the weekly
Standard
FEBRUARY 1, 1999 $3.50

THE CLINTON TRIAL -- EVERYONE WINS!
P. J. O'ROURKE

Good & Plenty

Morality in an Age of Prosperity
BY DAVID BROOKS

DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN ON NORMAN PODHORETZ

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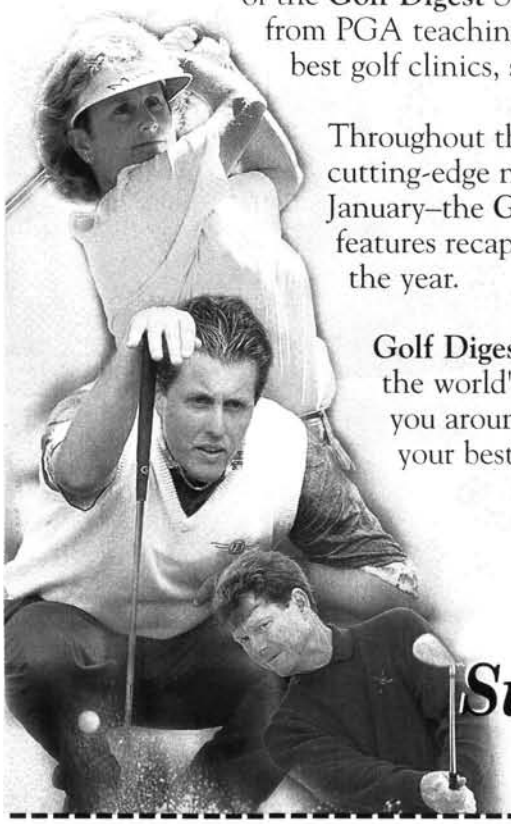

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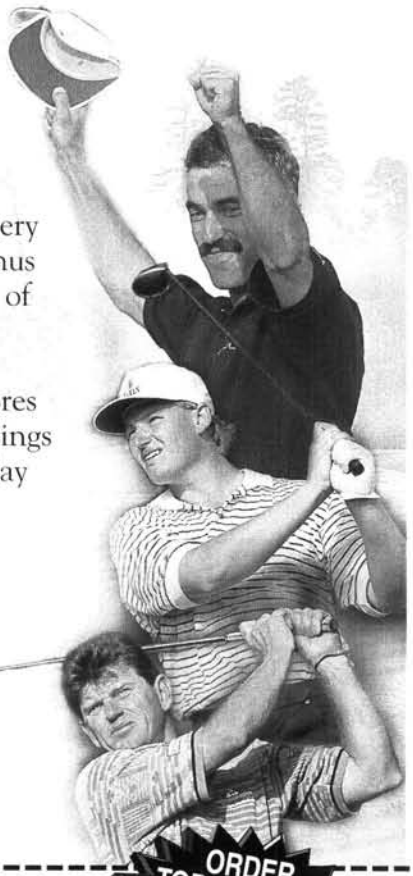

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VOLUME 4, NUMBER 19 • FEBRUARY 1, 1999

2 SCRAPBOOK

4 CASUAL
David Skinner's fame.

5 CORRESPONDENCE

7 EDITORIAL
The Real State of the Union

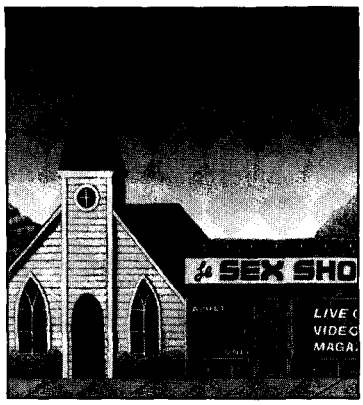
9 EVERYONE'S A WINNER
The upside of impeachment. *by* **P. J. O'Rourke**

12 "THE LIONESS IS THE HUNTER"
Cheryl Mills defends her president. *by* **Matthew Rees**

14 GLOOMY OLD PARTY
Republicans in the slough of despond. *by* **Fred Barnes**

15 CLINTON'S KOSOVO COLLAPSE
Milosevic gets away with murder. *by* **Robert Kagan**

40 PARODY
The ineffable greatness of Dale Bumpers.



Cover by Marc Burckhardt

17 GOOD AND PLENTY
Morality in an age of prosperity. *by* **David Brooks**

21 WHEN THE ECONOMY TURNS
What will happen to Clinton's popularity? *by* **David Frum**

25 LAWYERS, GUNS, AND MONEY
The ambulance chasers find a new target—"unsafe" firearms. *by* **Matt Labash**

Books & Arts

31 A CHARMED LIFE Isaiah Berlin and the role of intellectual courage. *by* **Joseph Epstein**

36 WIRING AMERICA Kevin Kelly's vison of techno-utopia. *by* **Mark Gerson**

37 EX-FRIENDLY FIRE Norman Podhoretz on the New York Intellectuals. *by* **Daniel Patrick Moynihan**

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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Clinton's Greatest Hits

Of all the instances of Clintonian State of the Union excess over the past six years, The Scrapbook was prepared to award first prize to the moment last Tuesday night when the president ostentatiously mouthed the words "I love you" to Hillary. But then Michael Medved, on his national radio talk show, pointed out a similar but even more stunning Clintonism from the 1996 address.

That speech, unlike this year's, had a section on "strengthening families." After fearlessly denouncing deadbeat dads, the president declared: "Our first challenge is to cherish our children and strengthen America's families. Family is the foundation of American life. . . . I call on American men and women in families to give greater respect to one another."

What's interesting is precisely how the president was demonstrating respect for his own family two days before voicing those admirable sentiments. On Sunday afternoon January 21, 1996, Bill Clinton researched family values at the White House with Monica Lewinsky. According to her sworn grand jury testimony: "I didn't know if this was sort of developing into some kind of longer-term relationship than what I thought it initially might have been, that maybe he had some regular girlfriend who was furloughed. . . . I asked him why he doesn't ask me questions about myself, and . . . is this just about sex . . . or do you have some interest in trying to know me as a person?"

The president laughed and said, according to Lewinsky, that "he cherishes the time that he had with me." They continued talking as they went to the hallway by the study and then, with Lewinsky in midsentence, "he just started kissing me." She testified that he then lifted her top, touched her breasts, and "unzipped his pants and sort of exposed himself." She then performed her version of Hail to the Chief.

Two days later, in the State of the Union address, the president made a special—and touching—point of honoring his wife. "Before I go on," he said, "I would like to take just a moment to thank my own family, and to thank the person who has taught me more than anyone else over 25 years about the importance of families and children—a wonderful wife, magnificent mother and a great first lady. Thank you Hillary!" This tribute naturally provoked thunderous applause from the huge crowd in the chamber of the House. And if you review the video tape of the speech and the beaming reaction of the first lady, there is, as always, not the slightest hint of insincerity.

This sordid but telling little episode has a sordid but telling little epilogue—also contained in the Starr report. When the president's secretary Betty Currie finally handed over to the Office of Independent Counsel the box of gifts she had retrieved from Monica Lewinsky, that box contained a hat pin, two brooches, an inscribed photograph of the president with Lewinsky, two T-shirts, a baseball cap—and "an inscribed copy of the 1996 State of the Union Address."

Warding Off Connerly

Ward Connerly, the California businessman who was responsible for the successful California Civil Rights Initiative two years ago, went to Florida last week to call on the new Republican governor Jeb Bush and other state politicians. It was a courtesy call—Connerly may launch a ballot initiative in Florida modeled on the one he led in California—but the courtesy was not reciprocated.

Connerly, a serious and brave public figure, alarms politicians. John Thrasher, the leading Republican legislator wouldn't meet with him. Top Democratic leader Les Miller, perhaps unsurprisingly, said "Mr. Connerly ought to stay in California." What was surprising was the reaction of Governor Bush. The new governor claims to be dubious about Connerly's plan because he prefers legislative action to ballot initiatives. But his remarks to reporters after meeting Connerly were condescending and shallow. Connerly, he said, "wants a war. I'm a lover."

Of course the last thing Connerly wants is a war. Here is an excerpt from an open letter to Colin Powell he wrote two years ago, that was excerpted in The Weekly Standard: "We who have lived the black experience have changed American culture. Perhaps the most significant contribution that we have made to America is the premium which our nation places on the civil rights of all Americans. Civil rights: Those personal rights which attach to each of us as American citizens, and which are guaranteed against encroachment by our government. *Equal treatment* under the law is one of those civil rights." This is a level of discourse to which serious governors should aspire.

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Scrapbook

Thesaurus of Denial

The love that dare not speak its name, according to the Merriam-Webster thesaurus, has many names, including: (adj.) inverted, queer, uranian; (related terms) bisexual, epicene, transvestite, lesbian; (noun) faggot, fruit, homo; (related terms) fairy, nancy, pansy, swish, sapphist, sodomite, pederast.

When Mike Webb, radio personality at KIRO in Seattle, found these entries in the America Online/Merriam-Webster online thesaurus, he went straight into activist mode. A few phone calls and a press release later, Merriam-Webster had issued an apology and AOL had shut down the online thesaurus to remove the entire entry, which will also be removed from future print editions of Merriam-Webster's thesaurus. This merely extends Merriam-Webster's editorial policy concerning race, religion, and ethnicity to include sexual orientation.

Some of the terms are clearly pejorative; others are only antiquated—for example, uranian, relating to a nineteenth-century English society. But so long as any entry carries with it controversial synonyms and related terms, Webb says he won't be satisfied. With unnerving consistency, he also objects to the thesaurus's entry for the adjective "Christian." Would you believe Merriam-Webster's lists "pious" and "decorous" as synonyms? The nerve.

The Lader Chronicles

Regular readers of The Scrapbook will be familiar with the saga of Renaissance Weekend honcho Phil Lader, longtime friend of the Clintons and current U.S. ambassador to the Court of St. James. Several weeks ago The Scrapbook reported that Ambassador Lader, at a speech before a group of Americans in London over Christmas, launched into commentary on the Monica Lewinsky mess. During the first Thanksgiving, Lader told the crowd "the Puritans gave thanks that they had been saved from the Indians. This year Americans gave thanks that they had been saved from the Puritans."

Last week, we printed an amplification from Nicholas Wills, vice president of the American Chamber of Commerce (UK) and host of the event at which Lader spoke. According to Wills, Lader's remarks about the Puritans had nothing to do with the vendetta that sex-obsessed Republicans are now pursuing against the president. Instead, the line was merely an unattributed quote from humorist Finley Peter Dunne.

If Wills is right, then Finley Peter Dunne's descendants might want to sue for royalties. Ambassador Lader, it seems, has been using the long deceased newspaperman's line all over town. This past Thanksgiving, former congressman Martin Hoke, a Republican from Ohio, found himself in London and decided to take his daughter to a service at St. Paul's Cathedral. Among the featured speakers: Ambassador Phil Lader, who promptly shared with the audience of thousands his apparently purloined joke about the Puritans. Some sophisticated Englishman in the audience laughed. Among many others who heard it, though, says Hoke, "there was a collective psychic gasp: What a stupid, inappropriate thing to say, casting aspersions at religious people at a religious ceremony."

Indeed. And if Lader is saying things like that in packed cathedrals, imagine what he's like at smaller gatherings. If you've been in London recently and would like to recount your experiences with Ambassador Lader, The Scrapbook wants to hear from you. Send your stories to: The Weekly Standard, Phil Lader Department, 1150 17th Street, NW, Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036.

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Casual

See Me and Cry

Recently I had the dubious pleasure of seeing my high school on the stage. I saw the musical *Fame*, which is based on the 1980 movie about New York City's High School of Performing Arts, my alma mater. Like the movie and its so-so television offshoot, the musical fails to do justice to the absurdities of a school whose purpose is to turn teenagers by the thousands into show-business professionals.

If you're a 14-year-old wannabe artist, of course, nothing seems more righteous than that a city school should cater to your creative needs. You are very special, after all. You've got talent. As a 14-year-old wannabe actor, I was special, all right.

I'd gone to a Catholic high school in Queens for a year before transferring to the drama department at Performing Arts. I made the move in order to study theater, but also to fulfill a pagan wish.

I wanted to turn my sweet life upside down. Deny the altar boy I had been. Forget that I had ever played soccer, let alone been the captain of a team. If I hadn't already started doubting God, I might have asked Him to bless me with some dark élan and make me a happy deviant, a changeling, grotesque yet somehow wonderful, if only in the eyes of the other changelings. My new high school seemed to be the place for me.

In the drama department, we were told that actors must know themselves well before embarking on a lifetime of assuming other identities. And to achieve this knowledge, we spent a lot of time exploring our inner selves. According to the tenets of Method acting, we were taught to keep mental files of strong emotions we had experienced and to use them in conjuring up emotions on stage.

To practice reliving our emotional pasts, we were required to recall, in front of the class, the most "authentic" episodes of our lives. The unstated rule was that painful memories were best. In the movie *Fame*, the class clown reveals the trials he endured growing up without a father. He weeps before his classmates and so grows close to them. We did quite a lot of that.

One boy, I remember, gave a slow and detailed account of the morning he woke up and found his mother dead. By the time he got to the point in the story where he was frantically searching for a mirror to see whether his mother was still breathing, the whole class was in tears. Our acting curriculum was such that he was able to recycle this material in several exercises. (Two years ago, he sent me a zine where he was publishing a serialized version.)

My own revelations fell short of that heady standard. My first time up, I recounted an argument I'd had at my old school: A janitor told me I wasn't allowed to enter the building through a certain door, so I let him know how unbelievably stupid he was; when he threatened to step outside and throw me into the traffic, I high-tailed it out of there. I felt the story captured my (cowardly and condescending) attitude toward the adult world, but my acting teacher deemed it insufficiently authentic.

One teacher we had was a Performing Arts grad brought back to teach some classes about life out in the real theater. She was so enthusiastic about getting students to open up that it was virtually all she had us do for a whole semester. I don't remember learning much about the biz, but we played many versions of a game in which students asked each other "what if" questions designed to elicit soul-baring or sexually embarrassing answers.

One time, when I was in the hot seat, it was the teacher herself who took the lead. What if I'd had dinner with her at her house on Cape Cod and then—just when I was leaving for the airport in Boston to meet my girlfriend—she'd tried to seduce me? What would I do? The nudging continued. What—with soft music playing, and a good meal in my stomach, and the ocean lapping against the edge of her backyard—would I do?

I didn't hesitate: I told her I'd go straight to the airport. But apparently not all my classmates were so out of step with her. During our senior year, she and one of them became the proud parents of twins.

Somehow in the confessional culture of Performing Arts, I never quite captured that dark élan I had aspired to. My efforts, in truth, were half-hearted. I didn't really buy Method acting and never could sustain friendships with those who did.

Besides, even as I harbored my pagan longings, I was absorbing an antidote. In my last months of high school, I had roles in two productions. Working hard turned out to be more liberating than telling family secrets and using art as a pretext for exhibitionism. It also taught me that I didn't much like the backstage world, so after graduation, I went off to college in Ohio, and I haven't studied acting since.

David Skinner

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PROTESTANT, CATHOLIC, JEW

David Dalin's review article on the Edward K. Kaplan biography of Abraham Joshua Heschel is an extremely thoughtful piece of writing ("The Jewish Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel," Jan. 4/Jan. 11). As Dalin notes, Heschel is celebrated by many American Jews for the political positions he took—in support of the civil rights movement, against the Vietnam War—rather than for the Orthodox Jewish beliefs that led him there.

Liberal opposition to religion in the public square is a recent phenomenon, reflecting the rise of politically conservative clergy, and was nowhere to be seen when clergymen like Heschel, Rev. William Sloane Coffin, and Dr. Martin Luther King were supporting "correct" views. One is left to wonder what Heschel would have made of liberals' opposition to religion in public life during the last quarter century, and Dalin persuasively suggests that Heschel's premises would have led him to a very different position than that now taken by many of those who applauded him then. (Dalin reminds us that his beliefs had already led Heschel, who died in 1972, to rethink his opposition to government aid to Jewish day schools and other parochial schools.)

That there is no one in the Orthodox community today with the same prestige and moral authority outside it—no new Heschel—is a sad reflection of the divisions that plague the Jewish community. It is hard to imagine an Orthodox rabbi as the community leader Heschel was during his lifetime, and harder still to imagine a proponent of religion in the public square as the embodiment of public morality for the majority of American Jews today.

ELLIOTT ABRAMS
WASHINGTON, DC

The Special Books Section on the three major religious thinkers is better than most I have seen in religious magazines, and must be a new high-water mark for a secular journal. All three of your authors point out that some twenty years ago, the religious Left was neglecting all three thinkers, while the "neoconservatives" began finding important inspiration in them, especially in the fact that all three thinkers—Kuyper, Murray, and Heschel—give priority to culture over politics and economics.

I hope a brief historical note may also be of interest. Before our marriage, my wife had known Rabbi Heschel at the University of Iowa, and the three of us met together for the first time at a debate on Vietnam in Berkeley, California, in January 1969. It was just after the Tet offensive, and our opponents in the debate were (as I recall) Prof. Robert Scalapino of Berkeley and Sen. Albert J. Gore Sr., who was then supporting the administration's position.

Because of the shock of the Tet offensive and because the setting was a church at Berkeley, our opponents entered the debate a bit abashed. Indeed, sharing the airplane with Sen. Gore the next day, I saw that he was about to break with the administration on Vietnam, a task that was difficult for him.

But what I remember most about that occasion was something Rabbi Heschel told me. He had the most liquid and penetrating eyes, and a soft voice that sometimes pierced one's soul (and was at other times a mite theatrical). He said to me, apropos of a work of mine on the sort of "night" and "darkness" in which believers often find themselves: "In the depths, people of different faiths are closer to one another than they are to persons in their own community who find faith easy." He added: "The deeper you go, the closer sometimes you find yourself to others who have a totally different history." From a relative stranger, these words hit the mark.

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(Correspondence continued)

Over the years, I've heard much criticism of Heschel, as of Murray. Both were greater men than those I've heard who criticize them.

MICHAEL NOVAK
WASHINGTON, DC

Russell Hittinger gives us a welcome reminder of the importance of John Courtney Murray as a mediator of the American experience to the world of Catholicism and of the Catholic tradition in social thought to the world of the American civil conversation ("The Catholic Theology of John Courtney Murray," Jan. 4/Jan. 11). It is particularly valuable as a reminder of the gulf that separates Murray from those Catholics who have embraced the privatization of religion demanded by liberal secularism. Nevertheless, I want to take issue with Hittinger on two points.

To begin with, while Hittinger mentions the role of Michael Novak and Richard John Neuhaus in bringing Murray's work to bear on the issues of our day, no discussion of the contemporary Murray revival can be complete without noting the contribution of George Weigel. Not only have Weigel's writings played a critically important role in demonstrating the relevance of Murray's thought to the contemporary American public argument, but his *Tranquillitas Ordinis: The Present Failure and Future Promise of American Catholic Thought on War and Peace* launched the contemporary rediscovery of Murray's work. Weigel, more than anyone else, is the architect of today's Murray revival.

More fundamentally, it is far from clear *Roe* v. *Wade* proves that Murray "underestimated the darker, skeptical forces" at work in American society. On the contrary, Murray was far from sanguine about the state of American culture. In fact, his writings on contemporary America, including those collected in *We Hold These Truths*, are pervaded by a sense of imminent crisis, by a fear that the American experiment in self-government and ordered liberty is in grave danger. And, as disastrous as he considered the revolution in church-state relations inaugurated by *Everson* and *McCollum*, this revolution was merely a symptom of a broader and deeper crisis. What had triggered this crisis was nothing less than the disintegration of the political, moral, and intellectual consensus that had inspired the American democratic experiment and upon which it depended for its vitality. "The great experiment of the American constitutional commonwealth," Murray insisted, "is not intelligible and cannot be made to work except by men who possess the public philosophy within whose context it was conceived." America, he lamented, was "rapidly slipping its moorings in reason."

Murray feared that the cultural vacuum was being filled by a secularist ethos subversive of justice and freedom alike. "Consciously and unconsciously," he wrote, "democracy is being transformed into the political and social organization of a great error, whose source is in the pagan darkness that always lingers, never fully clarified, in the mind of man. I mean the ancient idolatrous error of the self-sufficient man, who regards himself as sole architect of his own freedom, single author of the values that govern his life, ultimate judge of right and wrong, true and false." The ascendancy of this ethos serves to explain why "the mark of violence" has "impressed itself so deeply" on the "closing decades of the modern era."

In the light of his forebodings, I find it difficult to imagine that Murray would be shocked at the emergence of today's culture of death. It is, of course, true that he hoped that the shattering events of this bloody century would induce America to pull back from the abyss on whose brink it was tottering and return to what Hittinger terms "a classical moral order." Hoping for such a return, however, is not the same thing as expecting it.

KENNETH L. GRASSO
SAN MARCOS, TX

America's homeowners were immune from the credit crunch of 1998. Rather than having families defer their dreams of homeownership or denying borrowers the chance to refinance, Fannie Mae invested more in mortgages than any institution in the world. During the height of the turmoil in the credit markets in the third quarter of the year,

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the weekly Standard

THE REAL STATE OF THE UNION

While much of America is sleepily rubbing its belly and burping with satisfaction, may we take just a moment to point out that the state of the Union is actually quite *bad*?

Consider, first, the behavior these past two weeks of our print and broadcast press, whose ostensible profession it is to observe, understand, and explain the workings of the government. Gosh, we were told, over and over again, at the start: Henry Hyde and the other impeachment-trial managers have presented a Surprisingly Clear and Compelling Case that the president of the United States has done some genuinely awful things—inconsistent with the health of the Republic.

Surprisingly clear and compelling? True, over three long days January 14-16, Hyde and his colleagues mounted an honorable and effective argument that Bill Clinton's grotesque behavior in 1998 warrants his removal from office. But really, now—and it is no criticism of the House managers to say so—they told the Senate nothing, *nothing*, that could possibly have "surprised" anyone who claims to take such questions seriously. The whole of the evidence has been publicly available for months. And the only logical conclusions to be drawn from the evidence have been obvious for even longer. What can it *mean* that all our inkspillers and tele-pundit gabsters were only recently "surprised" to find a strong case against the president? What has American journalism been *doing* all this time?

And how, by this past weekend, could conventional wisdom in Washington have so drastically changed? Now, it was said, Henry Hyde's Surprisingly Clear and Compelling prosecution of the president had been rebutted by a Surprisingly Clear and Compelling defense from the White House. There are objective matters to be resolved here, of course, and the two contending sides in this dispute cannot *both* be clear and compelling. One must be correct and truthful. The other must be incorrect and dishonest. Analytical agnosticism on this question, at this late date, is one of the most irritating aspects of the Lewinsky scandal.

For the White House last week did *not*, in fact, present the Senate with anything close to a convincing demonstration of Bill Clinton's innocence. What the White House proved instead—once more—is that our president surrounds himself with men and women eager to defend even his most elephantine lies. Which fact alone, you would think, might be relevant to a proper judgment on the state of the Union.

It fell to White House counsel Charles F.C. Ruff, last Tuesday, to establish the general themes on which his lieutenants would expand. There was "no basis" for the House of Representatives to impeach the president, he informed the Senate. The charges against Clinton are unfair, "absurd," unconstitutional, even—built on "sand castles of speculation," constructed of "sealing wax and string and spiders' webs," inspired by a conspiracy between Paula Jones's malicious attorneys and an out-of-control Kenneth Starr. Again and again Ruff reminded the senators that "the only two parties who have knowledge" of this or that incriminating conversation have "both denied" they've done anything wrong.

This was rather like a mafia lawyer in a murder trial proposing that, simply because Fat Louie and Sammy the Fish have both testified that Louie never told Sammy to kill anyone, neither Louie nor Sammy can be implicated in the crime. But no senator laughed at Ruff.

White House special counsel Gregory Craig, in turn, launched a lengthy, exquisitely subtle disquisition on how oral sex (still) isn't really sex. Craig then abruptly reversed field, apparently without realizing it, and spent a good bit of time deriding the significance of any fine-tuned distinctions among sex acts. The president, you will recall, acknowledged to the grand jury that Monica Lewinsky had performed fellatio when they were alone together, but denied—defying common sense and Lewinsky's testimony—that he had ever touched her breasts or genitals. The president also insisted to the grand jury, in order to exonerate himself of witness-tampering charges, that he told his aides only "things that were true" when the scandal first became public.

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Except that White House aide John Podesta has testified that Clinton explicitly ruled out oral sex with Lewinsky. Any way you cut the evidence, it would seem, Bill Clinton has lied under oath in a federal criminal probe. Gregory Craig called this allegation, felony perjury by the president of the United States, "immaterial," "insubstantial," and "trivial." But no senator laughed at him, either.

Nor did any senator laugh at Clinton attorney David Kendall, who took nearly an hour to explain how it is perfectly natural for the White House senior staff, cabinet and sub-cabinet officials of the executive branch, and the president's best friend all to be continuously on the honker with the CEOs of giant corporations in an effort to secure out-of-town employment for a not-particularly-impressive 24-year-old administrative assistant. What of the fact that, during the final weeks of this job search, the president had submitted a sworn declaration in the Jones litigation that he'd never had sex with any federal employee—and that Lewinsky was a subpoenaed witness in the case, whose truthful testimony would reveal this declaration to be false? The "big picture" of these impossibly suspicious events, Kendall proclaimed, amounts to "zero."

Needless to say, no senator even dared *think* about laughing at White House deputy counsel Cheryl Mills, whose job it was to emit a further fog about the obstruction of justice counts against Bill Clinton. It is African-Americans, not the president, who are truly now on trial, Mills warned the Senate. Obstruction of justice in the Paula Jones civil rights action against Clinton? The "house of civil rights was never at the core" of that big-haired cracker's lawsuit, according to Mills. The house of civil rights rests instead—entirely—on Bill Clinton's shoulders, since he is right on all the issues, and since his grampaw once owned a store that sold things to black folks. To believe he is guilty, Mills announced, "you must not only disbelieve the president, you must also disbelieve Ms. Currie"—the president's African-American secretary. And that would be "an insult to Betty Currie and to millions of other loyal Americans" just like her. Hint, hint, hint.

Cheryl Mills says that the crime of witness tampering is not a crime at all unless the alleged tampering takes place

Judgment Day at the White House

A Critical Declaration Exploring Moral Issues and the Political Use and Abuse of Religion

EDITED BY Gabriel Fackre

"Politically, the president may survive his time on the cross," Kenneth Woodward writes in *Newsweek*, but many leading religious thinkers "still doubt his spiritual sincerity." Seeing the current crisis in the White House as a critical moment in the life of our nation, more than 140 scholars of religion and public life have penned the "Declaration concerning Religion, Ethics, and the Crisis in the Clinton Presidency," a statement meant to bring clarity to the moral confusion caused by the presidential scandal.

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after a relevant judicial proceeding has already begun. That is not true, and if she is the brilliant, rising-star attorney all the newspapers tell us she is, Mills knows it's not true—but she's saying so anyway. Cheryl Mills says no crime of witness tampering can be committed without some "threat or intimidation." That, too, is a bald-faced misrepresentation of federal law. Cheryl Mills says that when the president had his infamous "We were never alone, right?" interviews with the sainted Betty Currie, witness tampering was the furthest thing from his mind; Clinton was only trying to prepare for a Lewinsky-related media onslaught prompted by Internet gossip Matt Drudge. And that, too, is a lie.

Bill Clinton finished his perjurious Jones-case deposition on the afternoon of Saturday, January 17, 1998. When he got back to the White House, he called Currie at home and asked her to come to work the next day, Sunday, for the first of their questionable conversations. At the time he made this appointment, Matt Drudge's Web site had not yet so much as alluded to Lewinsky's existence.

By Monday, January 19, on the other hand, Washington was abuzz with talk of the intern. And by Tuesday night at 9 o'clock, the White House had been fully informed by the *Washington Post*'s Peter Baker about the blockbuster story that paper intended to publish in its Wednesday late editions. Senior White House aides spent the next few hours huddled in Charles Ruff's office, waiting for further news. While they were there, Betty Currie called Ruff to say she'd just been served a subpoena by Ken Starr's grand jury. Sometime later still that Tuesday evening, Clinton called Currie at home to tell her what the next morning's headlines would be.

And it was *after* all this had happened that Clinton and Currie had their second little "We were never alone, right?" chat. By which time the president not only knew he was the subject of a federal grand jury probe, he knew Currie was a subpoenaed witness. The president is guilty. Guilty, guilty, guilty.

But, hey—so what? Rep. Jennifer Dunn, Republican from the state of Washington, voted to impeach Bill Clinton. A healthy state of the Union, you might think she believes, requires Clinton's removal from the White House. But you would think wrong. Responding to the president's State of the Union address last Tuesday night, and *speaking for the Republican party*, Dunn told America that "the state of our Union is strong"—and will remain strong "no matter what the outcome of the president's situation." Got that? He is a criminal, and he must be impeached, but it won't matter a fig if he isn't convicted, because the wheat is high and the crime rate is low. "So what can you expect from Republicans?" Dunn asked, a few minutes further into her remarks. The altogether admirable Henry Hyde and his increasingly lonely allies notwithstanding, that question does sort of hang in the air there, doesn't it?

If so few people any longer even remember what the Union *is*, properly understood—"a government of laws, not men," and a hundred other principles routinely violated by the Clinton presidency—then the only fair conclusion must be that the state of that Union is really *not* so strong at all.

—David Tell, for the Editors

Everyone's a Winner

by P. J. O'Rourke

On January 8, 1999, the United States Senate, in all its dignity, solemnly swore . . . And talk about great TV! Especially when Trent Lott got tongue-bungled and said that the chief justice "will now administer the oaf." Anyway, the United States Senate, in all its dignity . . . If we don't count Sen. Barbara Boxer who was wearing a brown pants suit perfect for Breakfast Bingo at Wal-Mart. And what's with Rehnquist's robe? Adidas stripes on the sleeves, big old zipper down the front—it looks like a novelty beach wrap for vacationing gospel choirs. Nevertheless, on January 8, the United States Senate . . . got free souvenir "Oath Book" ball-point pens with "United States" misprinted as "Untied States." Mmmmm. Senators Bunning and Mikulski tried to return theirs. They are good-government types, unwilling to receive the smallest perquisite at public expense. Either that or they can spell. However, as I was saying, on January 8, the United States Senate solemnly swore to render an impartial verdict in the impeachment trial of President Clinton, and now I fear they actually might do it.

Senators, don't! Please fall into vicious partisan bickering instead. Mix drain cleaner into the coatroom jar of toupee glue if that's what it takes to bring tempers to a boil. Make the bar at the Palm restaurant a state and elect James Carville to your chamber. Hide Sen. Thurmond's Viagra. Force Sen. Kennedy to skip lunch. Give Sen. Byrd's history of the Senate to

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Michiko Kakutani for a snide review in the *New York Times*. Call witnesses, call an endless list of witnesses. Call Mick Jagger, he's slept with everybody. Call Dr. Laura Schlessinger. She knows Bill's type. Call me. In 1992, in Little Rock, Arkansas, I saw Gov. Clinton consume a jumbo order of fries in less than a minute, and I will testify under oath to his voracious appetites. But please don't stop the fun.

The Clinton impeachment is a thing of manifold splendor, and what's most bright and shining is that it has no downside.

If 67 senators say so, we are rid of a half-cracked slab of sophomoricism, a moral midden heap, ethical slop jar and backed-up policy toilet, a blabby, over-reaching nooky-mooch and masher. The dirty, selfish pest will be removed from office.

If the president is only censured, we are spared a busy, silly lickspittle puffed with all the bad ideas available at Harvard. That self-serious poop Al Gore will not be chief executive.

If the Republicans are spanked in the voting booth for prosecuting Bill, they'll be getting the hairbrush for the wrong offense. But they deserve a wallop on general principles—or, rather, lack thereof. What a feckless, timid, time-serving revolution that was in 1994, as if the sans-culottes had stormed the Bastille just to get themselves jobs as prison guards.

HAVE YOU CHECKED THE AMERICAN PEOPLE LATELY? LISTENED TO POPULAR MUSIC? WATCHED PRIMETIME TV? BEEN TO THE MALL?

If the Democrats are scorned for pitiful cynicism in rallying to a man who treats their principles of liberalism like he treats his bonds of matrimony, even better. Those who go toad-eating at the table of Gallup deserve heartburn.

And if it's the American people who are ultimately punished—well, have you checked the American people lately? Listened to popular music? Watched prime time TV? Been to the mall? Seen the hoi-polloi supersizing it at drive-thru windows in their carport-safari SUVs? Observed the masses waddling into airports, business offices, and churches dressed in drooping sweats or fuchsia warm-up suits or mainsail-sized Bermuda shorts, each with a mobile phone in one ear and a Walkman in the other and sucking Diet Pepsi through a straw? They could use a time-out.

Why should we rush to discover what the conclusion of impeachment will be when every possible outcome is so grand? Let's have another year of great expectations. Maybe two.

Alas, there are those who think differently. They decry the expense of the special prosecutor's investigations. But when has the federal government spent millions in such an entertaining fashion? Certainly not by funding PBS. True, there was the shuttle launch when NASA shot an aging politician into space. But then NASA decided to bring him back.

Some critics of impeachment claim that the office of president will be diminished to a mere custodial role. Yes! George W. Bush report to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and sign for your mop and broom.

Other naysayers argue that America's most talented politicians will be scared away from careers in public service. But the private sector will no doubt be able to put America's most talented politicians to use—making unsolicited dinnertime telemarketing calls.

It's said that the press has been discredited. This is a blind item planted by Jerry Springer because Ted Koppel has been swiping the more depraved guests.

It's said that the impeachment is spreading hypocrisy through the nation. Would this were so. Hypocrisy depends upon a clear-cut knowledge of the distinction between right and wrong. Recent poll numbers indicate that the public has no such knowledge.

It's said that we're entering an era of sexual McCarthyism. I can hardly wait for the congressional hearings. "Sharon Stone, are you now, or have you ever been, showing your boobs for purposes without redeeming social importance?"

And some earnest souls have gone so far as to aver that impeachment has distracted President Clinton from . . . from raising taxes, destroying health care, appointing 1960s bakeheads to high political office, soliciting felonious campaign contributions, hanging friends out to dry for Arkansas real estate frauds, giving missile secrets to the Chinese, taking credit for the benefits of a free market about which he knows little and cares less, using U.S. military forces as fig leaves for domestic scandals and au pairs for the U.N., leading foreign policy back into the flea circus of Jimmy Carterism, having phone sex, groping patronage seekers, and snapping the elastic on the underpants of psychologically disturbed school-age White House interns entrusted with the task of delivering high-level government pizza.

Plus there are the other benefits we've derived from this imbroglio. Feminism has been revitalized as Mack Daddy Clinton forced the tired jades of *Ms.* magazine to get back out on the media street corner in fishnet stockings and tube tops. The true agenda of the Movement Left has been revealed, albeit thirty years

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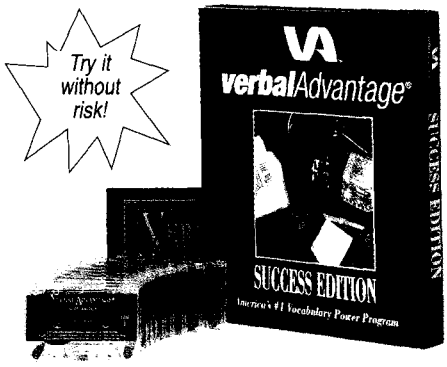

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late: They want to get entree to the nation's highest political office—and play with themselves in it. The New Democrats have discovered their core constituency: Larry Flynt. Wild GOP sex lives have been revealed. The very thought of naked Republicans should go a long way to curing America's obsession with the lewd.

Practically everyone involved in the impeachment has come up a winner. Paula Jones got a nose job. Monica Lewinsky got a *Vanity Fair* makeover. Gennifer Flowers got an I-told-you-so big enough to fill the Mall. And a number of sycophants and dupes on the White House staff won a chance to prove their fealty with legal bills at least that large. Susan McDougal had her jailhouse lipstick privileges restored. Lucianne Goldberg obtained copious PR, and her skills as a literary agent have already attracted many important authors who saw Vince Foster beamed up by a UFO. Vernon Jordan also secured free advertising, and everything that slithers on its belly in Washington is on the way to his law office. Linda Tripp got a reason to stick to that diet. Newt Gingrich gets to spend more time with his family. Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden received the air strikes from infidels that they needed to make their own pollsters happy. Ken Starr's lecture fees have soared on the skinny sideburn and big belt buckle gun nut and conspiracy buff circuit. And the Washington press corps has been given a permanent form of amusement called torturing Sidney Blumenthal. Sid will be returning to the journalism camp soon, and doubtless he'll get lots of laughs from the hot-foots, short-sheets, frogs in the oatmeal, and "kick me" signs pinned to the seat of his Jos. A. Bank casual khakis. Furthermore, think of the blessing to millions of future U.S. high school students trapped in the dreary confines of American history class. Finally, a chapter that boogies.

But what if Bill Clinton is a winner, too? What if he skates? What if this sleaze Houdini once again manages to fall into excrement and come up smelling like . . . smelling like the Rose Law Firm, probably . . . but unscathed and reckless as ever? What if he isn't even censured but, at the end of the Senate trial, is declared innocent by acclamation, receives standing ovations in both houses of Congress, is awarded a Freedom Medal, serves out his term with 100 percent job approval, and then goes on to a position of even greater prestige and power such as guest-hosting *Larry King Live?* Who cares? As Christopher Marlowe's Dr. Faustus lamented:

> *Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed*
> *In one self place; for where we are is hell,*
> *And where hell is there we must ever be.*

Or, to put it in terms that a man from Hope will understand: No matter what, Bill, your girlfriend's ugly, your wife hates you, and your dog can't hunt.

***P.J. O'Rourke is a contributing editor to* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.**

"THE LIONESS IS THE HUNTER"

by Matthew Rees

IT'S SOMEHOW FITTING that senators and pundits should be swooning over the White House lawyer who made the weakest defense of President Clinton. Cheryl Mills, a deputy counsel to the president, argued on January 20 that Bill Clinton did not obstruct justice in conversations with Betty Currie last January. To make the case, Mills distorted or ignored inconvenient facts. She also resorted to emotional ploys, including the race card. Yet when she finished, even crabby conservatives like Phil Gramm were queuing to shake her hand, and the *Washington Post* was comparing her performance to a Liza Minnelli show.

The reaction to Mills says more about the mood on Capitol Hill than the merits of her argument. After listening to harangues from familiar figures like Bob Barr and Greg Craig for two weeks, the senators and commentators were thrilled by a new face—especially the face of a composed 33-year-old black woman presenting herself as "powerful proof that the American dream lives." Any scrutiny of both her Senate presentation and her six-year tenure in the White House counsel's office, however, reveals an uncompromising loyalist in the mold of representatives Barney Frank and Henry Waxman.

Consider Mills's response when she learned last March that Kathleen Willey was scheduled to appear on *60 Minutes*, charging the president had fondled her. Mills scoured the White House for letters Willey had sent Clinton, and then made sure these letters, many of them affectionate, were given to the press. The move had the intended effect: Willey's credibility as an accuser was shredded.

Mills's spirited partisanship is captured by the

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screen saver in her West Wing office: "The lioness is the hunter." Not surprisingly, she is close to the first lady, with whom she shares an aversion to the press. A member of the legal team that crafted Clinton's defense strategy last year, Mills enjoys friendly relations not only with Betty Currie—whom she helped procure a lawyer when the Lewinsky story broke—but also with Vernon Jordan and Bruce Lindsey, two of the president's closest confidants. Acknowledging her access to the inner circle, Kenneth Starr last year paid Mills the compliment of a subpoena.

Mills began her Senate defense of Clinton by recounting her personal history. She revealed, for example, that her father had been in the Army for 27 years, and that her presentation was being made six years to the day after she started working at the White House. She also reminded her audience that she is "a lawyer, an American, and an African-American."

Then Mills launched into a spirited defense of her client. She began by claiming that Asa Hutchinson, one of the House prosecutors, had himself conceded that Clinton couldn't be convicted of obstruction of justice. But like much of Mills's presentation, this was dishonest: Hutchinson had simply insisted on the need for live testimony. "How can you vote to remove a president without hearing the key witnesses?" he had asked. Quoted in full, Hutchinson's statement had a meaning that Mills blatantly misrepresented.

Cheryl Mills

Kent Lemon

Later, Mills discussed Clinton's summoning of Currie to ask her a series of leading questions: "I was never really alone with Monica, right?"; "Monica came on to me and I never touched her, right?" Mills claimed Clinton couldn't be guilty of obstruction because "there is no evidence whatsoever of any kind of threat or intimidation."

This argument had several weaknesses. First, federal law does not require that threats or intimidation be shown in order to prove witness tampering. Second, Mills didn't suggest what legitimate reason Clinton could have had for asking Currie to confirm assertions he knew to be false or she knew nothing about. Third, Mills didn't address why the president called Currie into the Oval Office on a Sunday as opposed to simply calling her on the phone. And, fourth, she didn't address why the president repeated these leading questions to Currie a few days later.

The irony in having Mills defend the president against the charge of obstruction of justice is that she herself has been cited for obstruction. In August 1996, a House oversight subcommittee wrote to Clinton requesting documents relating to a White House database that might have been illegally shared with the Democratic National Committee. The White House turned over documents six weeks later, but Mills personally withheld two memorandums highlighting the interest of the president and Mrs. Clinton in merging the White House and DNC databases (one of the memos has a handwritten notation from Mrs. Clinton saying, "This sounds promising"). Mills claims she withheld the memos because she didn't think them relevant to the subcommittee's request. Yet when Charles Ruff, her superior in the White House counsel's office, discovered the memos six months later, he immediately gave them to the subcommittee.

Minor though this may be, there's overwhelming evidence Mills's sole motive in withholding the documents was to prevent embarrassment on the eve of the 1996 presidential election.

Indeed, testimony from numerous White House officials left no doubt she knew exactly what she was doing. Yet in November 1997, when Mills testified before a congressional committee, she maintained that withholding the memos had not been improper and that she didn't know which White House database the subcommittee was inquiring about. The subcommittee chairman, Rep. David McIntosh, was sufficiently dismayed by this testimony under oath that last September he wrote to Janet Reno to request an investigation of Mills for obstruction of justice and perjury. He has still not received a response.

Mills closed her defense of the president with a soliloquy on civil rights. She reminded the senators

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that Clinton's grandfather had owned a shop serving a mostly black clientele; and she portrayed the president as an "imperfect" crusader, akin to Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. Saddled as she was with a dreadful case and a cad for a client, Mills chose to make an emotional plea rather than argue the facts. It's hard to blame her.

Matthew Rees is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

GLOOMY OLD PARTY

by Fred Barnes

NO ISSUES, NO LEADERS, NO GUTS—other than these shortcomings, the Republican party is in great shape. Gallows humor is now rife in the GOP. "Every day at the RNC feels like an eternity," joked Jim Nicholson after he was reelected Republican national chairman last week. "Some days it's tough just to get to the bathroom."

Since the impeachment of President Clinton, the party has dipped 10-plus points in the polls. Members of the Republican National Committee blame congressional Republicans for concentrating on what's unpopular—trying to oust Clinton—while ignoring what really matters—an attractive agenda. Republicans on Capitol Hill blame Clinton for their declining popularity. As he left the House chamber after the president's State of the Union address, Senate majority leader Trent Lott muttered: "That's got to be the worst I've heard. Does the man have no shame?"

The answer is no. But the president's shamelessness is a given. Republicans will have to deal with it. Unfortunately, there's no evidence they've figured out how. Indeed, they've grown anxious about having put him on trial in the Senate for perjury and obstruction of justice. RNC members are apoplectic about the trial. "If it goes on much longer, we may not be able to repair the damage," says Connecticut GOP chairman Chris DePino. He's talking about damage to the Republican party, not to Clinton. "It's not helping us with the public," says John Ryder, the national committeeman from Tennessee. "Let's vote on it and move on." Even the two Republicans who gave the GOP response to the State of the Union address seemed embarrassed by the Senate trial, declining to discuss it or even utter the dread word "impeachment." Rep. Jennifer Dunn referred delicately to "the president's situation" and insisted there's no constitutional crisis in Washington.

The Republican malaise was evident in the speeches supporting Nicholson's reelection at the RNC meeting on January 22. With Nicholson as chairman, "we have done more things well than poorly," declared Arizona GOP chairman Mike Hellon. Hardly a ringing endorsement. "The biggest complaint I hear is a lack of cohesive message," he continued, but "that wasn't Jim Nicholson's fault." Hellon said it was the fault of House and Senate Republicans. Last year, "they simply would not listen. Well, they're listening now." All the same, that brings us to the three major shortcomings paralyzing the Republican party.

Issues. Republicans don't have many at the moment. They grouse that Clinton is the great issue thief, but so what? They should be thrilled that Clinton is forced to loot the conservative agenda. Who'd have guessed a few years ago that he would favor using a budget surplus largely to make the Social Security system solvent? Not I. But that's what he's done. And, flip-flopping with abandon, he's swiped other GOP issues as well. He's now for lifting the earnings limit for Social Security recipients. He thinks missile defense is necessary. He's for increasing military spending. He's even for conservative goals in education. Sure, his motives are bad. Clinton backs conservative positions *solely* for the purpose of preventing Republicans from using them against him and, in 2000, against Al Gore. But the point is he's left Republicans with little to call their own.

Except tax cuts. Unlike impeachment, this is an issue that unites Republicans. The question is whether Republicans in 1999 have the courage of their convictions. In 1998, they didn't. Then, the House passed a tax cut, only to have Senate Republicans kill it. Nicholson said Republicans must seek an across-the-board cut of "at least" 10 percent. If they do, Clinton is bound to accuse them of robbing funds from Social Security and jeopardizing the system. Republicans will have to weather that. What else? Republicans could up the ante on other issues, sending Clinton a hike in defense spending of $50 billion instead of $10 billion or a bill that voucherizes federal funds for special education. A Clinton veto would only give these issues more visibility.

Leaders. Where is Newt Gingrich when Republicans need him? "It's a party that doesn't know how to function without a single leader to rally around," says

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Vin Weber, the former GOP House member. "Now there isn't one, and that's demoralizing everyone." Gingrich was last in a line of Republicans—Goldwater, Nixon, Reagan, and Bush—who could command the party. For all his faults, Gingrich was a visionary and a fighter. Lott is a dealmaker. House Speaker Dennis Hastert is a den mother. Nicholson is a nice man, but he's hardly able to dictate an agenda to congressional Republicans. Rather than competing on an equal footing with Clinton, these Republicans are merely the president's foils. Unfortunately, the party won't have a real leader until its presidential nominee is crowned in August 2000. Depending on who's nominated, it may not then either.

Guts. This is the real problem for Republicans. Clinton's success in remaining popular while impeached has left them downcast. House Republicans are all but ready to throw in the towel. They're persuaded (by polls) that moderate and independent voters have been turned off by Republicans, particularly by their pursuit of Clinton. They believe that if these voters aren't mollified, they'll lose the House in 2000. So what should House Republicans do? They figure they'll be better off compromising with Clinton instead of fighting with him. It will then be up to Senate Republicans to repair any bad deals they make with Clinton and the Democrats. "We're going to be sending the Senate a lot of junk," says a GOP official. "If anyone's looking for us to excite the [conservative] base, it's not there."

So 1999 is not going to be pretty for Republicans: Clinton off the hook, congressional Republicans cowed, no presidential nominee in sight. Sounds bad. But there's always that gallows humor to fall back on. Jay Leno noted Clinton's approval rating jumped to 76 percent after his State of the Union address. "This is significant. This is the first time Clinton has gone up in the polls without committing adultery first." One member of the RNC has his own variation. "If Clinton has oral sex two more times, he'll be above 90 percent." The fellow laughed grimly at his own joke.

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

CLINTON'S KOSOVO COLLAPSE

by Robert Kagan

THE SHAM DEAL ON KOSOVO that Richard Holbrooke struck with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic last October has now definitively, and predictably, collapsed. Like so many other feats of Clintonian diplomacy over the past few years—especially in Iraq—the bargain with Milosevic was a magician's trick to make a policy of retreat appear as a victory born of firm American resolve. Magic tricks can usually accomplish the Clinton administration's main foreign policy objective: getting through that day's news cycle and kicking the can down the road. But reality inevitably intrudes, and usually faster than the Clinton folks expect. The common wisdom last October was that Holbrooke's deal with Milosevic would keep things quiet in Kosovo at least until March. But the deal was so bad, so unworkable, that it collapsed in a matter of weeks.

Over the past two months Milosevic has violated the ceasefire agreement in almost every way imaginable. He has significantly augmented his military forces in Kosovo, breaking through the already too-generous ceiling which Holbrooke's agreement had placed on those forces. He has launched aggressive attacks on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. He has either ordered or permitted his troops to massacre some 45 civilians, including women and children, in what U.S. ambassador William Walker, the head of the international verification mission in Kosovo, called a "crime against humanity." He has demanded the expulsion of Walker from Kosovo. He has prevented the chief prosecutor of the U.N. war crimes tribunal from entering Kosovo to investigate the atrocity. And he has told a parade of American envoys, including the U.S. commander of NATO forces, General Wesley Clark, to go jump in a lake.

Now presumably Milosevic must face the consequences. But what are the consequences? Well, that takes a little explaining, because as Saddam Hussein can tell you, in Bill Clinton's world the American response to flagrant international misbehavior is not exactly what you would call swift and sure.

The Clinton administration is once again hoping to use the "threat of force"—as opposed to force itself—to make Milosevic back down. One might think that the abject failure of this tactic over the past year, both in Kosovo and in Iraq, would by now have convinced the administration to give up on it. Absolutely no one in the world is falling for this Clintonian bluff anymore, least of all Milosevic. But the administration persists in believing that the

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"threat of force" is actually a key tool of policy.

As it happens, however, even getting to the point where the "threat of force" can be made is going to be difficult. First, Clinton officials must get NATO allies to approve an "activation order" that would theoretically permit General Clark to begin military action. The key word here is "theoretically." For even if such an order is approved, it will be almost meaningless.

The "activation order" will be accompanied by an ultimatum to Milosevic, giving him a set period of time to meet whatever terms NATO decides on. And therein lies the problem. Getting all NATO allies to agree on what terms Milosevic would have to satisfy to avoid air strikes will not be simple. Some NATO allies, like France and Greece, will want to make the terms easy for Milosevic to comply with, and the Clinton administration will have to compromise on some of its own tougher conditions or risk losing allied support. Milosevic thus scores a victory without moving a muscle.

Next comes the question of compliance. As the deadline approaches, Milosevic will probably have fulfilled some of NATO's conditions—late last week he was already hedging on the expulsion of Walker—but not all of them. Who will decide whether or not he has failed to comply and military action should begin? Not General Clark, and not the Clinton administration. The United States will have to go back to the allies and get agreement, again, that military action can go forward. Some allies, like France, may want to declare that Milosevic had complied sufficiently to avoid military action, or will argue that the deadline should be extended further to give him more time.

If this all sounds preposterous, it is. But this is precisely what happened last October, when NATO last went through this complex little dance. And the reason is the same now as it was then. Neither the allies nor the Clinton administration actually want to go ahead with military action against Milosevic. What they want to do instead—what they hope for, instead—is to use the "threat of force" and pray that Milosevic will let them off the hook, even if that means accepting another bad deal like the one Holbrooke negotiated last October.

In fact, the situation is even more complicated than it was in October. Thanks to Holbrooke's dubious agreement with Milosevic, there are now about 800 unarmed international "verifiers" in Kosovo. This "civilian army," as Holbrooke made bold to call them, has of course been incapable of stopping the Serb offensive and atrocities. That would have required a real army, something which neither Clinton nor the NATO allies had the stomach to insist on. Now the verifiers have become what many critics of the Holbrooke agreement predicted they would become: hostages. In October, administration officials assured skeptics that if Milosevic violated the ceasefire and it became necessary to carry out military action, the verifiers on the ground in Kosovo would not pose a problem. "One can use military power even while . . . international monitors [are] on the ground," insisted State Department spokesman, Jamie Rubin. Or, if necessary, the verifiers could be quickly hustled out of Kosovo by an "extraction force" based in Macedonia.

Now that the moment of truth has arrived, however, it turns out that things are not so easy. For one thing, the famed "extraction force" is not yet capable of carrying out its mission. As one NATO official told the *New York Times* last week, "We'd have to get the monitors out before we could do anything. For that, we'd have to increase the size of our extraction force in Macedonia. All that takes time, as Milosevic well knows." Another problem is that the "extraction force" is made up entirely of French troops. Since France is skittish about carrying out military strikes in the first place, will it be willing to order its inadequate forces into action to clear the way for those strikes?

Milosevic knows all of this, of course. He knows all the hurdles the United States must jump through before it can even threaten to use force. He knows how long it will take NATO to complete its deliberations. If air strikes are ever actually approved, he can calculate almost to the hour when the attack will begin. But above all, he knows that the United States and its allies are extremely reluctant to attack. Jamie Rubin insisted last week that "no one should doubt NATO's resolve." But NATO doubts its own resolve. As NATO General Klaus Naumann more candidly acknowledged, "the democratic states are wrestling with one another over this." NATO is not "an intervention alliance," Naumann declared, "we are not global police."

Milosevic's actions over the coming weeks, therefore, are almost as predictable as NATO's. He will remain intransigent while the allies bicker. He will continue and perhaps even escalate his military offensive in Kosovo, in the hopes that he can do serious and lasting damage both to the Kosovo Liberation Army and to its civilian supporters. Then, if NATO does approve a new activation order, Milosevic will wait until the last moment, pull back his forces, and return to the negotiating table. This is precisely what he did last October.

And if the Clinton administration behaves true to form, it will also do what it did last October: Declare victory and hope that no one notices the magnitude of its defeat.

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GOOD AND PLENTY

Morality in an Age of Prosperity

By David Brooks

Plainfield, Connecticut, is a nice, decent American community. It's a town of about 14,000 people, up near the northeast border with Rhode Island. It was incorporated in 1699 and quickly became a small industrial center, powered by the two rivers, the Quinebaug and the Moosup, that flow by. George Washington met with General Lafayette at an inn there during the Revolution, an event that's commemorated in the town hall. Plainfield had a prominent role in the first Great Awakening, the religious revival of the 1730s. At the height of the fervor a local woman was miraculously cured of her blindness, and her testimony drew pilgrims from far and wide. The town remained prosperous through the 19th century. Bigger textile mills came to town. French Canadian and Irish laborers flocked in. Surprisingly spacious company houses were built for the workers, and grand Victorian homes went up for management, along with banks, offices, and several churches.

The 20th century has been more turbulent. There were labor troubles at the mills starting in 1928; then the Great Depression closed the mills down for a time. Things picked up during World War II. The huge factory in the center of town was converted to make caskets and hospital equipment. When the soldiers returned home, they found a thriving economy. Jobs were waiting at the furniture plant, the rebounding textile mills, the American Standard porcelain plant, and at the nearby defense contractors. I asked some of the older residents whether the cultural upheavals of the 1960s had affected the town much. They didn't know what I was talking about. They remember the late sixties as a golden age when jobs were plentiful and the factories were buzzing.

The mills began closing in the early eighties. The big factory in the center of town now sits idle and silent, like a 400-yard-long dinosaur slumbering among the stores and houses. American Standard pulled out. Many of the defense jobs disappeared in the nineties. Now the old Victorian houses look shabby, but, given the economic shocks, the town has handled itself well. There's little sign of outright poverty. People still gather each morning at Rizer's restaurant to talk about politics and outrageous sports salaries.

This is a place where the social fabric is strong. These are classic working-class Democrats, heirs to the blue-collar social ethic that emphasized hard work, decency, solidarity, and the local parish. There's also a strong military culture in Plainfield. The most prominent landmark in town is the old tank in the central square next to the monument that commemorates the sons and daughters of Plainfield who gave their lives in this century's wars. It's an amazingly long list of casualties for such a small town, a sign of how many local men and women served and continue to serve in the armed forces, right down to the young woman killed in Desert Storm. Every year, the local VFW post puts on the largest V-J day parade in Connecticut.

But last year something strange happened. A businessman from out of town opened a striptease club and porn shop within the city limits. The townsfolk were outraged. Plainfield still has a Town Meeting system of government, and hundreds of people gathered at a series of meetings to vent their anger at the porn invasion. Signs went up on nearby fences, "No Sin, No Topless." The first selectman, Paul Sweet, tried to come up with zoning regulations and other legal means to prevent the club from opening. After several of his efforts were shot down, he thought of using Megan's Law to harass the place. The town passed an ordinance saying that every person who walked into the club had to have his name checked against a list of known sex offenders. Needless to say, this sparked a legal challenge, which is pending. But the strip club is open, and the people of Plainfield are still angry. A couple of World War II vets told me that every time they drive by the club they count the number of cars in its parking lot. They're dismayed to discover that the place does good business. They're proud to note that many of the plates are out of state.

So far it's a simple morality tale, a small town invaded by a sleazy pornographer. But American morality tales are never really that simple. In the first place, it should be noted that Plainfield's economy has

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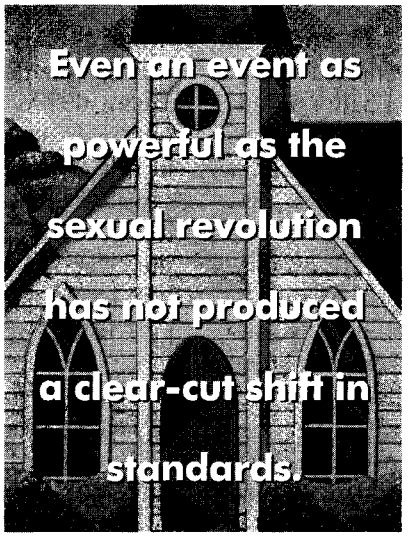
rebounded from the plant closings of recent years, and it has done so because of gambling. There's a dog-racing track in town. And just down the highway, local Indian tribes have opened massive casinos, which together have created thousands of local jobs, many of them held by residents of Plainfield. So here we have a town awash in gambling money up in arms because somebody dared open a strip bar. If the place had a tabloid, it might run the headline "Black Jack Dealers Object to Go-Go Girls."

This is a reminder that American moral standards are multifaceted. There's been a lot of talk, especially from our heroes on the right, to the effect that America is in cultural decline. In 1987, Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* described a student culture corroded by easygoing nihilism. In 1996, Robert Bork's best-selling *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* described a nation depraved by radical egalitarianism. The conservative periodicals ring with lamentations over the state of our culture. In 1995, George Gilder wrote in *Commentary*, "Bohemian values have come to prevail widely over bourgeois virtue in sexual morals and family roles, arts and letters, bureaucracies and universities, popular culture and public life. As a result, culture and family life are widely in chaos, cities seethe with venereal plagues, schools and colleges fall to obscurantism and propaganda, the courts are a carnival of pettifoggery." This year, William Bennett declared in Hillsdale College's periodical, *Imprimis*, "Our culture celebrates self-gratification, the crossing of all moral barriers, and now the breaking of all social taboos."



But the fact is, moral standards don't necessarily rise and fall all at once, in great onslaughts of virtue or vice. The reality is more like mixed trading in the stock market, with standards rising in one area and falling in the next, making it very hard to tell whether the aggregate effect is positive or negative. In Plainfield, for example, the townsfolk are tolerant of gambling and, if anything, more intolerant than ever of indecency. So is the town better off or worse?

And when you look across American society generally, it's the complicated rise and fall of moral standards that you see. In humor, for example, we have become tolerant of sexual jokes over the past 30 years but extremely intolerant of ethnic jokes. Most would consider that progress, but others disagree. The effects of the 1960s notwithstanding, America has become much less tolerant of drug use over the past few decades. In 1969, drugs were celebrated in song and on screen: "Black and White, A Picture For the Stoned Age" is how one movie was billed. Today that would be unacceptable. And our standards about public drinking are probably more restrictive than at any time since Prohibition. In the fifties, people drank at lunch and got drunk at parties. Now that rarely happens. Reporters used to be hard drinking carousers, if my older colleagues are to be believed. Now we all sip bottled water. On cable, I recently stumbled across an old episode of *Match Game 73*. Six celebrities were asked to complete the phrase "half-___," and the contestant had to guess how they had filled in the blank. He guessed "half-drunk," which was a good answer because four of the six celebrities chose either "half-drunk" or "half-crocked." Today if the same *Match Game* question were asked, the most common answer might be "Half and Half."

Even an event as powerful as the sexual revolution has not produced a clear-cut shift in standards. On the one hand, sitcoms like *Friends* have a level of sexual explicitness that would have been unthinkable a quarter century ago. On the other hand, there are signs that attitudes about sexuality and promiscuity are growing more conservative. Twenty-five years ago, the *New York Times* mixed advertisements for X-rated movies with the ordinary movie ads. You'd have *The Sound of Music* on the page right next to *Deep Throat*. Today, the *Times* doesn't run any porn advertisements. Twenty-five years ago, there were at least five all-nude musicals on the stages of New York. Last year, Nicole Kidman bared her tush for five seconds and the whole town was titillated. A few decades ago, John Updike was writing chic novels about wife swapping, and Gay Talese was doing a long research project on sexual awareness. Now that kind of stuff is considered juvenile. A generation ago, the upper-middle classes, at least, seemed willing to tolerate adultery to preserve marriages. Then in the 1970s and 1980s, people became more tolerant of divorce. Now, it seems to me, most people regard divorce as a much graver tragedy than they did 15 years ago. The research find-

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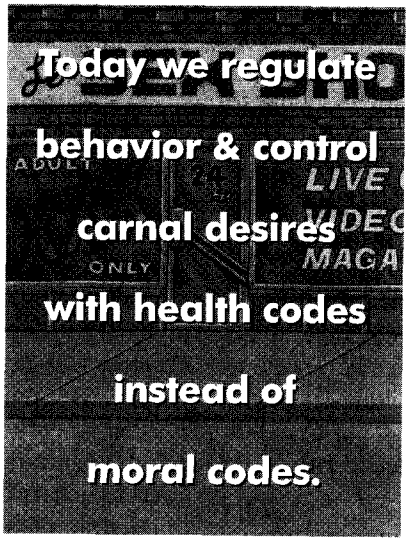
ings about divorce's consequences for children have had their effect.

We shouldn't leap to conclusions about the supposed degradation of our culture. And in making our judgments, we can't just ignore all the social indicators that are moving in the right direction: abortion rates are declining, crime is down, teenage sexual activity is down, divorce rates are dropping. As the residents of Plainfield demonstrate so plainly, just because people have loosened their standards in one area doesn't mean they have loosened them across the board.

There's another complication in the Plainfield morality tale. It has to do with the language the people of Plainfield use in protesting the strip bar: the language isn't moralistic. When I went around talking to the locals about the bar, I occasionally stumbled on someone who was willing to tackle the issue on moral grounds. One of the World War II veterans complained, "The people who go there are perverts and pedophiles." But it was clear that most people regarded this way of talking as a faux pas.



In general, the people of Plainfield I spoke to seemed to go out of their way not to appear moralistic. "We're not trying to infringe on anybody's rights to do what they want," first selectman Paul Sweet says defensively. Instead he talks about crime and public safety, "You tell me one good thing that comes out of that industry. It will mean more police overtime costs. It will mean more drinking, more disturbing the peace. It will reduce property values." Sweet's language reminded me of New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani's largely successful effort to restrict his city's sex industry. Giuliani never talks about strip clubs and porn theaters in moral terms, even when goaded by an interviewer. Instead he talks about crime, real estate prices, and neighborhoods amenable to upscale business development.

Sweet and Giuliani are taking on an issue that could be cast in moral terms and choosing to discuss it in the most mundane, practical way. In doing this, they are merely replicating the pattern we see across American culture. Today, when we try to teach our kids decent behavior, we don't come on to them with moralizing, we preach health and safety. We don't denounce the evils of demon rum, we warn about the danger of drunk driving. Today the mainstream culture does not celebrate chastity as a godly virtue. But you hear a lot about safe sex, and people preach abstinence as the safest form of all. As Charles Krauthammer has pointed out, "The core of the modern sexual code is disease prevention." All that was once a matter of morals is now profane.

In other words, today we regulate behavior and control carnal desires with health codes instead of moral codes. Today in mainstream society, people seldom object to others' taking the Lord's name in vain—but watch out if they see a pregnant woman smoking or drinking. Today few Americans mind that stores are open on the Sabbath, but they'd be appalled if they saw a family driving around without seatbelts. Katie Couric would never think of inviting a preacher onto the *Today* show to praise the virtues of a temperate life. But morning after morning, she hosts health and fitness experts who talk about the need for rigorous exercise, self-disciplined eating, getting a full night's sleep, and leading a careful, well-regulated life. These physical regimes may encourage moral behavior through the back door. People who follow them are leading lives of discipline and self-restraint, but they're doing so in the name of their bodies instead of their souls.

Of course, many social critics would say the moral life of the nation is impoverished if issues like pornography are reduced to matters of crime and property values and personal behavior is evaluated primarily on health and safety grounds. Such prosaic discourse ignores the really profound issues: the state of people's souls, their prospects for salvation, their relationship with God. Morality as mere healthism is meager, superficial.

Nonetheless, it is this modest, prosaic way of setting social standards that prevails in America today, and not just in Plainfield. These are happy, prosperous times. People seem to have decided that they don't want the status quo roiled with disputes over fundamental principles, with religious controversies and moral crusades. Instead they want a lower-case morality that will not arouse passions or upset the applecart.

Against this backdrop, is America's non-response to the way Bill Clinton has dishonored the presidency

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a surprise? The American people have made two separate judgments about Bill Clinton, captured in a *USA Today*/CNN poll released last week. Does Bill Clinton provide good moral leadership? Seventy-nine percent of Americans said no. Is Bill Clinton honest and trustworthy? Seventy-four percent said no. But do you approve of the way Bill Clinton is handling his job? Sixty-nine percent said yes. Has Bill Clinton's presidency been a success? Eighty-one percent said yes.

As to which set of concerns is the more salient for Americans, it is not the abstractions like "moral leadership." Instead, it is the concrete, prosaic factors: the booming economy, the Dow approaching 10,000, the budget surplus, the declining welfare rolls. In an age of peace and prosperity, material facts are more important to people than abstract moralism. You can see this, by the way, in Plainfield. A socially conservative but instinctively Democratic community, the town is split about the president. Paul Sweet, the selectman, when he first heard about the Lewinsky matter, thought Clinton should step aside. But now he is appalled by the way the media continue to humiliate the president, so he is once again a strong Clinton supporter. One of the things everybody I talked to in Plainfield seemed to agree on—whether they loved Clinton or loathed him—was that personal behavior has no connection with public performance. Many people were willing to condemn his perjury, but nobody wanted to moralize about the president's adulterous affair with a 21-year-old intern.

Some conservatives have argued that this non-judgmentalism is a product of 1960s moral relativism, that the amoralism of the counterculture has seeped into the mainstream of American life. In fact, the counterculture has nothing to do with the attitudes on display in Plainfield and across the country. The counterculture of the 1960s was utopian. It believed in emancipating the individual from repressive social strictures and so elevating him to a more free and natural spiritual realm. It rebelled against bourgeois materialism, always searching for transcendental breakthroughs. Today's moral attitudes are anti-utopian. They are utilitarian. They are modest. They are, in fact, the values of the class the counterculture hated most. They are the values of the bourgeoisie.

If we are going to blame anybody for today's dominant morality (if, indeed, blame is what is called for), it's not Abbie Hoffman or Gloria Steinem we should hold accountable, but Benjamin Franklin, the quintessential bourgeois. The bourgeoisie has always been the social group that preferred the prosaic to the transcendental. Bourgeois man likes to go about his business, his eye fixed on his local concerns—happy family, friendly neighborhood—without bothering himself about grand abstractions or glorious causes. He is uncomfortable with moral crusades and religious enthusiasms. He is never heroic. He has no grandeur. Instead, he is modest, useful, and reliable.

The bourgeoisie has always been the target of vicious ridicule from bohemian radicals for precisely this reason: Its members lead tepid, mediocre lives and are content with sentimental morality, with giving the belly priority over the soul. They never seem to look up from their quotidian concerns to grapple with great truths or profound moral issues. They never seem to get outraged by any injustice or immorality that doesn't directly affect their own lives. In their hands, Karl Marx noted, "all that is holy is profaned."

These days, of course, it is not just Marxists and countercultural poets who are offended by the prosaic materialism of the bourgeoisie. It's also the conservatives. It is conservatives who are urging the American middle classes to rise from their prosperous torpor and get outraged at Bill Clinton. They are the ones exhorting the middle classes to restore the moral climate of the nation, to think about what sort of America we are leaving our children. But for such grand speculative issues the bourgeoisie has no taste, and the mass of Americans are deaf to conservative pleas.

It's a strange turn of events. For the past thirty years conservatives have been the great *defenders* of bourgeois values against the assaults of the countercultural radicals. In recent decades, conservatives have praised the businessman, the shopkeeper, the homemaker against the insults hurled by alienated intellectuals. Let us restore bourgeois values and reject the arrogant theories of the elites, the conservatives have said. Well, my fellow right wingers, you wanted bourgeois values? You got 'em.

In fact, there's no cause for alarm. The bourgeoisie may be as dull and morally insensate as the bohemian radicals on the left and the moral activists on the right say it is. But despite all that, the bourgeois has a *temperament* that almost always leads him to the reasonable path. He may not be heroic, but he is responsible. He has a healthy suspicion of people who radiate certitude. He prefers the familiar to the unknown, the concrete to the abstract, civility and toleration to conflict and turmoil. He has an amazing ability to not react; to just let things slide by that don't directly affect him. And most of the time it turns out okay. In his own steady, unadventurous way, he has been able to build the country—and sustain its fine communities like Plainfield. ♦

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When the Economy Turns

By David Frum

Everything will be different eighteen months from now. It's one of the oldest rules of politics, and also one of the hardest to remember. The present is so real, so glaring; the future so murky, so contingent. Who could believe in 1991 that the triumph in the Gulf would immediately fade? Or that the recession would end before Clinton's inauguration? And as Clinton ascended the rostrum of the House on Tuesday to boast of the country's wealth, take the cheers of his party, and bask in his skyscraping poll numbers, it seemed equally far-fetched to imagine that anything could tarnish his amazing political success.

Certainly the Republicans who replied to the State of the Union seemed unable to imagine it. Jennifer Dunn and Steve Largent delivered two of the most abject speeches ever to make a late-night viewer wince—first denying that the impeachment of a president for multiple felonies ought to concern the American people very much and then implicitly apologizing for having impeached him.

LET'S TRY THE CRAZY EXPERIMENT OF IMAGINING THAT CLINTON IS VULNERABLE TO AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN.

The Dunn and Largent speeches seemed to take for granted that the salient political fact of the next election cycle will be the continuing overwhelming popularity of Bill Clinton. And of course it is possible that in 2000 the president will be as popular as Ronald Reagan was in 1988. But is it not equally possible that the Republicans are once again getting ready to fight the last war?

The Republicans were hammered in 1996 because they had started and lost a budget fight with President Clinton. So they entered the 1998 election cycle determined never to wage another budget fight—only to get hammered again in 1998, as the federal surplus piled up and high-income voters revolted against the Republicans' unwillingness to press for broad tax relief.

In the aftermath of 1998 and with the acquittal of the president looming, the GOP is buzzing with advice from friends and foes alike as to how to reposition the party for the 2000 election. That advice tends to build on the premise that the country's condition in eighteen months will be essentially what it is now. Yes, many economists are predicting something of a slowdown in 1999. But with the stock market roaring, interest rates plunging, and the Asian, Russian, and Latin American financial crises a faraway and confusing menace, those same economists have decided that the 1999 slowdown will probably be only a prelude to the recovery of 2000.

And maybe that's right too. But here's something to contemplate: The U.S. economy has been growing for more than six years, since the middle of 1992. It's sixteen years since the end of the last severe recession. Question: What happens to American politics if the economy turns?

The cynical answer is: oh, nothing much. The Clinton administration's critics have so often predicted its imminent destruction—from the recession that was supposed to follow the 1993 tax hike, from the Whitewater and campaign-finance scandals, from public reaction against a humiliating foreign policy—that by now we tend to assume nothing short of the finger of God pointing to Clinton himself as the cause of tidal waves, typhoons, and locusts could do much to damage him.

But just for a moment, let's try the crazy experiment of imagining that Clinton is vulnerable—if not to proven charges of criminality, then to economic disappointment. What happens to him and to American politics if, despite the stock-market euphoria, the East Asian, Russian, and Latin American depressions do crimp the American economy this year or the next? U.S. exports, especially high-tech and agricultural exports, are already tumbling—by some 20 percent to the worst-hit market, East Asia. Meanwhile imports are rising, as the collapse of currencies from the Thai baht to the Canadian dollar slashes the price of goods

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made in those countries. This puts pressure on American manufacturers to reduce their own costs, by, for example, laying off workers. The United Steelworkers and the big steelmakers have already formed a coalition, "Stand Up for Steel," to lobby for even thicker barriers to Japanese and South Korean metal. Clinton (naturally) pandered to them in his State of the Union address. Subsidizing U.S. jobs, however, aside from its other demerits, will prolong and aggravate the slump overseas and enlarge the threat that slump poses to the U.S. economy.

A potentially even more menacing danger is taking form across the Atlantic. On January 1, the European currencies ceased to move freely against one another and were fixed relative to one another for the three years remaining until they are scheduled to disappear and be replaced by the single European currency. Fix any of those rates too high, and it will have a deflationary impact; fix any too low, and it will tend to create inflation. And since eleven currencies are joining the European Monetary Union, there were fifty-five exchange rates for the Euro-wizards to set accurately, creating many, many opportunities for error—and further international monetary instability.

None of this necessarily means that the End is Nigh for the U.S. economy. It's possible the United States may muddle through, with no worse shock than a slowing of growth in 1999. On the other hand, the outlook is not exactly confidence-inspiring. And an economic downturn would have considerable political significance.

The 1990s have been an unusually serene time for the American economy and thus an unusually uneventful period in American politics. It's not true, as President Clinton likes to say, that this is "the best economy in thirty years." Actually, the 1992-98 expansion has had the lowest average growth rate of any since the end of World War II. What it has been is an unusually untroubled expansion. Compare the Clinton prosperity to the Reagan boom. The expansion of the 1980s began in 1983, just as the great surge of people born in the peak years of the baby boom, 1957-62, were looking for their first jobs. The number of women seeking full-time work peaked in the 1980s too, and immigration from war-torn Central America and an oil-busted Mexico surged.

With so many workers to absorb, the economy of the 1980s was always attended by relatively slack labor markets. Not until 1987 did the unemployment rate push below 6 percent, and in only a single month of the Reagan boom—March 1989—did unemployment fall as low as 5 percent. The cohort entering the labor market in the mid-1990s, however, was the small generation born in the 1960s and early 1970s. As a result, even though the economy grew less fast in the 1990s than it did in the 1980s, and even though real interest rates were not much lower, unemployment rates fell much further: Since May 1997, they have remained between 4.6 percent and 5.0 percent.

These numbers—with a little help from news media that have inexplicably lost interest in such once-favorite topics as homelessness, deindustrialization, and the (still-growing) gap between the incomes of the top 5 percent and bottom 20 percent of households—may explain why voters have been consistently more likely to say that Bill Clinton's relatively sluggish America is on the "right track" than they were to say so of Ronald Reagan's much more dynamic America. That feeling of economic well-being, in turn, has protected Clinton from being wounded by his administration's scandals and crimes. So far anyway. But now suppose that those happy conditions were to end.

Since 1994, Clinton has offered the Democratic party a devilish bargain: Accept and defend policies you hate (welfare reform, the Defense of Marriage Act), condone and excuse crimes (perjury, campaign finance abuses), and I'll deliver you the executive branch of government. But this bargain can hold only so long as Bill Clinton's grip on the presidency does. If that grip falters—if a weak economy threatens to cost the Democrats the White House in 2000—the Clinton bargain will cease looking like clever politics and start looking like a disgusting betrayal of Democratic principles.

Nor will Clinton's standing in the country be more secure. Again since 1994, Clinton has survived and even thrived by deftly balancing between right and left. He has assuaged the left by continually proposing bold new programs—the expansion of Medicare to 55 year olds, a national day-care program, the reversal of welfare reform, the hooking up to the Internet of every classroom, and now the socialization of the means of production via Social Security. And he has placated the right by dropping every one of these programs as soon as he proposed it. Clinton makes speeches, Rubin and Greenspan make policy; the left gets words, the right gets deeds; and everybody is content.

But if unemployment lines were growing, how long would the AFL-CIO and Clinton's supporters in black America stomach this president's hands-off economics? If incomes and asset values were tumbling, would middle-class Americans continue to yawn at Clinton's penchant for dreaming up new ways to

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spend their money? Worse, for all of Clinton's invocations of a "Third Way," it's quite clear that in hard times, the Third Way rapidly deteriorates into the old hardhat-and-steamshovel First Way. Look at the advice the Clinton economic team is administering to depressed Japan: Build highways! Dams! Pave over the entire island! It's as if they'd been clipping Felix Rohatyn articles from the 1981 *New York Review of Books* and saving them for just this emergency. Clinton's Third Way is a skiff that floats only in balmy weather.

Nor is it just the Democrats who need to worry about the politics of a downturn. The successful politics of the 1990s for both parties have been symbolic politics. For Democrats: V-chips, school uniforms, free cell phones for community-watch organizations, a patients' bill of rights, whoop-whooping against the evils of tobacco. For Republicans: the balanced budget amendment, the gauzy weepiness of the '96 convention, the congressional reforms in the Contract With America, whoop-whooping against the evils of marijuana. These gestures have achieved their political purpose because in good times, Americans expect relatively little of their government.

In bad times, however, micropolitics suddenly looks absurdly inadequate. Remember the fate of George Bush's "thousand points of light" in the recession of 1991? Or how silly Jimmy Carter's cardigan sweater looked after Iran took Americans hostage? In bad times, Americans rally to big ideas: to an Eisenhower who promises to "go to Korea," to a Kennedy who promises to "get the country moving again," to a Reagan who promises a 30 percent tax cut, and—yes—to a Clinton who promises health insurance for all that can never be taken away. That same opportunity may well beckon in 2000.

There are at least three grand issues or themes whose politics could look radically different in the wake of a slump: Social Security, taxation, and Clinton's personal style.

Social Security first. The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* still posts on its cover a doomsday clock, graphically illustrating how close the world supposedly stands to nuclear Armageddon. It may be time for the board of governors of the Social Security system to borrow this attention-getting device. The crisis in Social Security is due in less than 10 years: in June 2008, when the first of the baby boomers turns 65. What should be done? President Clinton's State of the Union proposals are probably gambits: It seems incredible that he could believe that any Congress would let the government buy up industry. Clinton's main idea seems to be that if he can pile up big enough budget surpluses now, he will reduce the strain on the system in a decade. This squirrel-in-winter approach to pension finance is laughed at by most economists, but it has helped Clinton achieve his real goal—avoiding an across-the-board tax-cut—while (as a bonus) making it seem as if he were actually taking some action on the crisis.

Now suppose the economy turns down. The bud-

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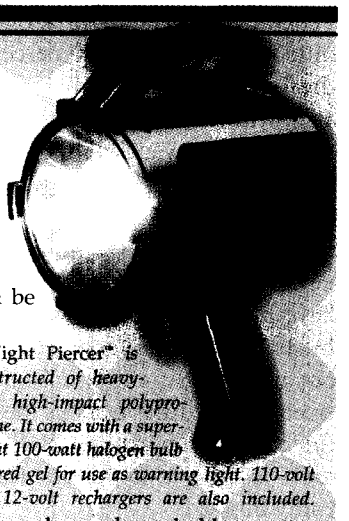

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get surplus—which owes its existence to the fantastic increase in federal tax revenues of the past few years (up from $1.154 trillion in fiscal 1993 to $1.743 trillion estimated in fiscal 1999, a 51 percent increase, with much, much more projected for the years ahead)—will shrink, even vanish. If it does, so do the Clinton administration's not-very-convincing-to-start-with claims to be doing something about Social Security. Clinton's verbal formulas worked politically because they gave people the comforting sense that somebody was keeping a careful eye on their financial future, and the mountain of money in the surplus was the tangible proof. No surplus, no proof. No surplus, and all the allegedly radical ideas of those who actually want the problem solved rather than evaded suddenly cease to look so radical after all.

Now think about taxes. In 1999, federal revenues will exceed 20 percent of gross domestic product for the first time since 1945. (Federal revenues were only 17 percent of gross domestic product when George Bush left office.) Federal, state, and local taxes combined now consume 40 percent of the income of the median family: an all-time record, more even than during World War II. Unlike in the last period of tax creep, the 1970s, middle-class wage-earning households have been insulated from the rising burden of the Clinton years by a proliferation of new, targeted, phased-out tax benefits. These benefits have minimized middle-class tax resentment: There has been no 1990s version of Proposition 13. And with business conditions seemingly so favorable, it's hard to convince Americans of the value of tax cutting for the economy in general, as Bob Dole found out when his promise of a 15 percent across-the-board tax cut so badly flopped.

If business conditions were not so favorable, however, the Clinton tax increases would not be so readily ignored. People get more anxious about where their dollars are going when they feel they have fewer of them. More urgently, in a recession the deflationary impact of high taxes will not be as easily brushed aside as it was in 1996. We've all watched the Japanese economy trapped for half a decade within a seemingly inescapable recession by its government's unwillingness to significantly lower tax rates: It's easy to imagine such a thing happening here—and easier still to explain why it should not.

Finally there's the Clinton style. Probably not since John F. Kennedy has a president so influenced the way other politicians dress, talk, and emote, and not only in the United States, but around the world. Think of Gerhard Schröder and Tony Blair as much as George W. Bush and Newt Gingrich. (Well, where else did Gingrich get the idea to pose for his last book in hiking boots and open-necked shirt?) But unlike Kennedy, this much-mimicked president is not much admired: One of those polls he lives by, CNN-Gallup's poll for January 8-10, shows that by a 55-42 margin, the public does not respect him as a man. A "Kennedyesque" politician is glamorous and witty; a "Clintonian" politician is a shameless liar.

THE CLINTONIAN STYLE IS PERVASIVE BECAUSE IT SEEMS TO HAVE ACHIEVED FANTASTIC RESULTS. IT'S TEMPTING (OR DEPRESSING) TO BELIEVE IT WILL BE WITH US FOREVER.

The Clintonian style is pervasive because it seems to have achieved fantastic results: Here's a politician who—if the law were strictly enforced—might easily be in the slammer, and instead he boasts 70+ percent job-approval ratings. It's tempting to infer from the Clintons' repeated success in overcoming the most gaping self-inflicted wounds that there's something about this style that is especially well suited to a postindustrial economy, to a female-majority electorate, to—well, name whatever fancy theory you like. And it's equally tempting (or depressing, depending on your point of view) to believe that the Clinton style will therefore be with us forever.

But again: the politics of Clintonism may look very different if the economics do. If eighteen months from now we are all talking about mistakes that were unnecessarily stumbled into, avoidable dangers that were inattentively not avoided, tough but urgent decisions that were evaded or fudged—we may find that about the last thing any ambitious pol wants is to be confused with the man whose most quoted remark is destined to be, "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is."

This is all speculation, of course. Clinton has enjoyed amazing luck throughout his career, from his escape from the draft to the stock market rally that immediately followed his disastrous August 17 speech. His luck may yet hold just long enough to get him out of town with most of his secrets still intact and his job-approval ratings still at record highs. Since 1995, the coin has come up "heads" just about every time that Clinton has tossed it. Who knows? It may come up "heads" a dozen times more. Personally, I wouldn't bet my life on it. But Clinton has. ♦

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LAWYERS, GUNS, AND MONEY

By Matt Labash

Wendell Gauthier loves to smile. Sure, the most renowned class-action lawyer in New Orleans possesses many other trademarks. He has full-bodied Atticus Finch hair, and he's tailored like a mogul from Milan. With a soft Cajun accent, he's a fount of country-lawyer malapropisms (he says his old friend Edwin Edwards, the frequently indicted former governor of Louisiana, has a "photogenic mind"). But Gauthier's defining characteristic is the infectious, perpetual, coprophagous grin. Indeed, an opposing lawyer once objected to a judge that Wendell Gauthier smiled too often. With his track record, who wouldn't?

A veritable Zelig of mass-disaster litigation, Gauthier has twice ranked as one of the *National Law Journal*'s "100 Most Powerful Lawyers." From the 1982 Pan Am plane crash to the 1980 MGM Grand hotel fire, from bone screws to breast implants, if it burns, leaks, seeps, or (praise God) explodes, chances are Gauthier is heading up the plaintiff's committee, siphoning 25 percent to 35 percent contingency fees from the multi-million dollar jackpots relinquished by accident-prone companies waiting to get milked in class action lawsuits. This year, Gauthier will earn about $2.2 million. But that's just small change. He had a starring role in the state lawsuits against Big Tobacco that may end up netting him and his nationwide 64-firm consortium—the Castano group—hundreds of millions in fees. And while the tobacco settlement works its way through the courts, Gauthier and the Castano group have trained their sights on another politically unpopular industry and are moving in for the kill.

As he emerges for an interview in his Metairie office north of New Orleans, Gauthier is suppressing yet another grin. He has just been on the phone with Johnnie Cochran who, he says, "wants in on the action." Many lawyers do. For "the action" is shaping up as the next big thing in industry-gouging, trial-lawyer ransom demands. Gauthier, you see, has declared war on gun manufacturers for—brace yourselves—making guns that kill people.

The legal offensive against gun makers has taken off since Gauthier's first client, New Orleans mayor Marc Morial, filed suit on October 31 against 15 handgun manufacturers, three trade associations, and several local pawn shops. It has now even received the blessing of President Clinton, at least indirectly, when he called for "child trigger locks" on handguns in his State of the Union address. It's hard to win a product liability lawsuit when the product in question is intended to be dangerous and is not "defective" by any ordinary understanding of the word. Indeed, no one ever has won such a suit against a gun maker. But there's a Catch-22 in American product liability law: If manufacturers can be forced to add safety features to their wares, it becomes easier to sue them for not improving their products sooner.

For the New Orleans suit, Gauthier and Mayor Morial enlisted the help of Sarah Brady's Center to Prevent Handgun Violence—which for years brought unsuccessful suits against gun manufacturers for accidental deaths. The suit accuses gun makers of not incorporating safety designs that prevent the use of guns by children or other unauthorized users. No matter that some of these technologies—like "smart guns" that won't fire without a radio signal from the owner's transmitter—have yet to be proven reliable. Like the states that made claims for the medical expenses of smokers, the city hopes to collect damages for everything from tax revenues lost from dead citizens to the cost of laundering the emergency-room scrubs of the doctors who treat gunshot wounds. But Morial denies seeking to fill city coffers; rather, he is suing on behalf of "the children." And while Gauthier also insists his motives are more pediatric than pecuniary, he'll take 20 percent of any settlement and 30 percent of any judgment should the case go to trial.

New Orleans's idea was so swell that the city of Chicago filed a similar suit two weeks later. Since the city prohibits the sale or possession of handguns that weren't registered before 1982, Chicago is pressing a public-nuisance claim as opposed to New Orleans's product liability approach. But like New Orleans, Chicago is in it for "the children." Mayor Richard Daley, up for reelection this year, had his police department conduct a three month sting entitled "Operation Gunsmoke." Undercover officers posed as

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gangbangers, militia members, and "motorcycle toughs" (the press release's words) while baiting suburban gunstore merchants by saying they needed to "take care of business."

The result is poorly lit video footage of gunstore clerks with bad mustaches selling weapons to cops who speak in B-movie criminalese, asserting that they're protecting their "spot," which is supposed to give the clerks the idea that they are dealing with druglords. While Daley has loudly touted the unlawful behavior of the clerks selling guns to these apparent criminals, not a single target of the investigation has been criminally charged. Instead, Daley appears to have taken the unusual tack of dedicating police resources to facilitate a $433 million *civil* lawsuit against not only the gunshops, but the 4 distributors and 22 manufacturers who are allegedly overrunning the suburban market with products they know will be used within city limits.

Like New Orleans, Chicago is seeking damages for everything from police overtime to the cost of wiping blood from the streets. Unlike New Orleans, Chicago is suing with city lawyers and two civic-minded law firms that are serving—*gulp*—pro bono. "We won't be representing them," Gauthier offers jauntily.

The mayors' crusade

Gauthier has little cause for worry—nobody is anticipating an epidemic of pro-bono largesse amongst the bar. But the odds are great that other cities will want to follow the examples of New Orleans and Chicago. During last June's meeting of the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Reno, Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell launched a task force to work with the gun industry, promising any litigation against manufacturers would be "10 years down the road." That was one short decade. In the publicity downdraft of the New Orleans and Chicago lawsuits, Rendell now speaks of the possibility of up to 100 cities filing suit within the next six months. At least 15 other mayors, from Baltimore to St. Louis to Los Angeles, have already declared their intent to sue. All these cities need legal representation, of course, and here, Gauthier and his colleagues will prove a godsend. Cities that operate on austerity budgets may not be able to fund protracted litigation or conduct sting operations. But attacking gun manufacturers is a no-lose proposition for big-city mayors. They appear tough on crime to constituencies that are generally more tolerant of gun-industry bashing than their rural cousins, and they are effectively gambling with someone else's money. If the cities don't collect, the trial lawyers will eat the litigation costs. If the mayors win, jackpots will abound, and nobody will quibble with the lawyers' 30 percent cut.

Gun manufacturers have already started grousing about the unfairness of it all. There is for one thing no evidence to suggest they concealed the fact that their products, when used as intended, kill people. Rather, they tend to advertise it. Their chief defense is that the law is on their side; that both cities' cases are absurd on their face. But who can be sure these days that the law will trump public opinion?

And inflamed public opinion, not the law, will be crucial to the success of Gauthier and his counterparts. As the University of Chicago's John Lott has noted, in 1996, 230 children under the age of 15 died from accidents with guns in the United States. Over the same period, 950 drowned and 500 died in bicycle accidents. There is of course, no cry for the heads of swimming pool manufacturers, lifeguards, or Huffy executives. Likewise lives that are lost to gun accidents are exponentially offset by the 2.5 million times a year law-abiding citizens successfully employ their "unsafe" guns defensively. Ironically, the morning the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* announced Morial's lawsuit, the front page also carried an account of a gun-toting good Samaritan warding off a knife-wielding stalker in a parking garage just minutes from Gauthier's law office.

While the gun industry is vowing to fight, its various parties are a diffuse, iconoclastic lot who are resistant to pooling resources for a united legal front. They contend the mayors will never get a judgment by applying untested legal theories (similar cases against the industry have been dismissed), but that's hardly a sure thing. The tobacco lawsuits effected the largest transfer of wealth in the history of civil litigation—without a single judgment ever being entered against the industry. And since the $2-billion-a-year gun industry earns a tiny fraction of the Big Four tobacco companies' annual profits, the gun manufacturers are in a bind. If they settle, they might have trouble scratching up enough ransom to sate the mayors and their attorneys. If they don't settle, they face not 50 lawsuits, as Big Tobacco did against the states, but hundreds of lawsuits from cities across the nation.

It's enough to make even a trial lawyer take pity—and no less of one than Mississippi's Richard Scruggs, who masterminded the states' anti-tobacco attack. Scruggs says he has no plans to join the latest "gang-bang." He agrees with the gun manufacturers that this is a naked attempt to accomplish judicially what couldn't be accomplished legislatively—nationwide gun control. And he's skeptical that the cities will curtail death rates. Scruggs thinks litigation will drive

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legitimate gun dealers out of business and foster a thriving black market. But more important, "If Chicago wins, they'll put those guys into bankruptcy, and New Orleans won't get anything. There's just not enough money to go around."

Scruggs, who led a rival faction to Gauthier's in the tobacco litigation and made out much better, may be overstating. Gauthier has made a career of plundering relatively small targets that keep him and his colleagues bringing in seven and eight-figure sums a year.

Kevin Chadwick

This type of litigation is a science, really, designed to force quick settlements, since protracted class-action judgments can mean financial ruin for companies (and a meager payday for those who sue them). It's what industry types call the Masai Move—named for the African tribesmen who don't kill their cattle for steaks, but repeatedly draw blood from the beasts for a nutritious beverage. The mass-disaster bar has similarly grown wise over three decades of pillaging. Rather than put anyone out of business, better to let them go on doing the producing, then step into court and tap them, Masai-style, right in the neck.

If the gun manufacturers think the Gauthier crowd will be deterred simply because they are not, like tobacco, the biggest torts prize in history, they're in for a shock. As one bloodied tobacco lawyer says of Gauthier's Castano Group, "The gun manufacturers are really in for it. These guys are shrewd and well-funded . . . and don't give a s— about anything except how much money they can make."

"Toys are not us."

What makes Gauthier and his colleagues so formidable is their bellicosity. Though his New Orleans comrades call him "Goat" (his name is pronounced "Goat-chay"), he's better known as "the General" for building the A-team of ambulance chasers—a roguish band of overpaid and outsized egos whose displays of plumage and aggression have earned them wrestling-card sobriquets like "the Girths," (a group of Castano lawyers known for their sybaritic corpulence). In the early days of Castano, New Orleans lawyer Russ Herman swore that he'd never work alongside John "the Wizard of Bhopal" Coale, the lawyer who famously signed up 7,000 defendants for a class-action suit against Union Carbide after its plant explosion in Bhopal, India, though it was rumored that many of his Indian clients couldn't read their retainer agreements. Herman even called Coale a "cesspool" in print. Coale, who once solicited the family members of ValuJet-crash victims by mailing them pictures of his CNN-commentator wife Greta Van Susteren, referred to himself as a "pirate" and suggested Herman was putting on airs to compensate for not going to Harvard. Gauthier responded by appointing the two men co-chairs of the Castano Group's public relations committee. His successful laissez-faire management style, he explains is: "Let 'em scrap."

And scrap they do. Gauthier says that during tobacco negotiations, Coale, who was kicked out of high school for stealing hubcaps, actually started an elevator fistfight with fellow lawyer Hugh Rodham, brother of Hillary Rodham Clinton and member of the Castano Group. Rodham was recruited by Gauthier, who was determined not to get "out-brother-in-lawed" by rival Scruggs, who is married to Trent Lott's sister.

This shamelessness serves as the bedrock of a litigation philosophy pinched from Gauthier's "idol," the late Melvin Belli, aka the "King of Torts" (a Castano member until his death in 1996). After once commanding his weeping client to convince a jury of her botched operation by baring her deformed breasts, Belli recalled that he "could hear the angels sing and the cash register ring." Gauthier built on this tradition. After the 1986 Dupont Plaza Hotel fire in San Juan, Puerto Rico, which killed 97 people, Gauthier and Co. actually moved to the island before the cinders had cooled. The fire had been deliberately set by three

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angry Teamsters in the midst of a labor dispute. Gauthier's coalition, however, sued not only the hotel (which was carrying a mere $1 million in liability insurance), but also 200 manufacturers, right down to the makers of the dice in the casino. At least their non-flame-retardant products were present at the time of the fire. Belli was fined for suing on behalf of a man who had died 12 years earlier. The case was so unwieldy—over 2,300 plaintiffs brought suits—the judge had to build a special courtroom just to contain the lawyer traffic. The gun industry should take note: All this firepower was marshaled against a single hotel for a $220 million settlement.

Those who know Gauthier best say litigation for him is not just about the settlements—or even the beloved children—it's about the contest. Law partner Danny Abel, who has an encyclopedic knowledge of French Quarter watering holes and off-menu specialties, explains Gauthier's love of the hunt to me and his young litigation assistant Shane D'Antoni, as we slop oyster po' boys at the Napoleon House. "Money's not the major issue. We're just a bunch of country [boys]. . . . Toys are not really us," Abel says, though Gauthier has owned a piece of the New Orleans Saints, a Rolls-Royce, and an interest in a casino.

Abel knows Gauthier better than most. They were fraternity brothers at Southeastern Louisiana State. While chain-smoking Marlboro mediums, Abel moderates a slurred Sazerac-influenced symposium on the evils of tobacco and firearms. Shane and I are smoking Dominican cigars as thick as babies' legs, which Shane was kind enough to purchase after lecturing the employees of the tobacco shop on how cigarette companies target children. If the New Orleans handgun lawsuit seems sophomoric, there's a good reason. Abel says Shane first brought up the idea to Gauthier last year when he was a college sophomore. At the time, "we were doing the other s—, tobacco, which is about children," explains Abel. So they walked in to Gauthier's office with the gun idea and said, "*This* is about children."

Though the hour is late and the Quarter is infested with loutish tourists, we are secure in the knowledge that Abel has a .32 caliber Beretta in his truck. Never mind that it has neither the loaded-chamber indicator nor the magazine-disconnect—the safety features that Gauthier and the city of New Orleans call for in their "safe guns" suit. It is a minor hypocrisy in a city that passed a law in 1996 encouraging it's citizenry to shoot carjackers, after Ms. Louisiana had her Ford Taurus boosted from her driveway. What is a major hypocrisy, however, is the behavior of Gauthier's client, Mayor Marc Morial.

The city's suit faults manufacturers for not developing the technology to keep "unauthorized users" from firing guns. The supposed remedy for the undocumented spate of suicides and accidental shootings for which New Orleans is ostensibly seeking damages would be for manufacturers to incorporate push-button combination locks in gun grips or develop "smart guns" that require the owner to wear a wrist-band radio transmitter to fire (only Colt has developed a prototype, which they say is still years away from working properly). While the suit faults manufacturers for not being innovative enough, it goes after everyone from pawn shops to trade associations for encouraging the sale of "unsafe" guns. But Morial's own police department has placed itself in the distribution chain—with his approval. Last February, the New Orleans police department traded in 715 Beretta 92 Series pistols for 1,700 Glocks. To complete the transaction, the department also agreed to trade guns confiscated from criminals in a three-way-transaction with a distributor who supplies police departments and who also sells guns commercially.

According to paperwork supplied by Glock, Inc., and accounts of the transaction by Glock vice president Paul Jannuzzo, the city traded over 8,000 confiscated guns, at least 40 percent of which were semi-automatics, and nearly all of which are "unsafe," by the definition of the city's lawsuit. The letter to Glock from Police superintendent Richard Pennington that consummated the deal is signed and approved by Morial.

According to Jannuzzo, over half of the guns traded in were redistributed commercially in cities from Abilene to Carpentersville, Illinois (a suburb of Chicago). While some of the local pawn shops it is suing sold fewer than 50 guns last year, the city of New Orleans redistributed thousands. This is perfectly legal, of course. But if the specious logic of New Orleans's own lawsuit is applied, the city could technically become a defendant in other cities' lawsuits.

Alligator Mick' and the guv'nah

If any of these cities wants to file suit, there's a place it can go to get great legal representation: Vizard's in the Garden District. It is at this restaurant, a former bordello that is owned by one of Gauthier's law associates, that I break paneed sweetbreads with Gauthier, Abel, and other Castano lawyers. There's Calvin Fayard of Denham Springs, nicknamed "Calhoun" after the shyster lawyer from *Amos 'n Andy*. And there's Michael St. Martin from Houma, La., whose friends call him "Alligator Mick." When he's not

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hunting the offshore personal-injury cases that have made him one of the richest men in the state, St. Martin hunts alligators with rotting chickens and shark hooks.

They are a garrulous and jovial crew. They strictly prohibit grabbing checks or taking a swallow without their topping off your wine. ("Buy a reporter, get a good story," Wendell says with a wink.) If fatty foods and alcohol are next on the mass-torts hit list, as some suspect, it is clear that these lawyers will bring into the courtroom an extensive personal knowledge of the products. They are happy to be here with their families, eating calamari stuffed with Gulf shrimp and slurping sherry-laced turtle soup. They are happy to sit next to a neighboring table of full-sweatered southern magnolias ("The one in the blue should open a dairy farm," Alligator Mick observes). Mostly, however, they are sue-happy.

Fayard promises to send me some of the best strawberries in the state. And if I disparage those strawberries in print, he adds, "I'll sue the s— out of you." Of St. Martin, Fayard warns, "He'll sue anybody but his doctor." Later, when I break the news to Gauthier that a gunowners group called the Second Amendment Foundation is threatening to sue the cities for violating their civil rights, Gauthier shrugs: "We gonna sue them before they sue us for interfering with our contract. Boy, that'll be fun!"

Scruggs says the Castano Group is "the best bunch of bulls—ers you'll ever see." A week later, I'll see what he means. While soliciting clients at a Conference of Mayors gathering in Chicago, Gauthier emits confidence pheromones, speaking in a thick-Cajun brogue that he must save for the road, as country lawyers travel well. Dennis Hennigan of the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence drops the ball in front of a roomful of reporters, while trying to prove the efficacy of Saf T Lok, a purportedly easy-to-use combination lock in the gun's grip. Hennigan fumbles and fails to unlock the gun in a well-lit room with no intruder at the door. Hair grays. Epochs wane. Finally, disengaging the safety, he apologizes, "Most people aren't as klutzy as I am."

But Gauthier makes no such missteps. "We gonna win this thing in Loo'siana, ain't no doubt about that. It's just simply what amount and when," he brags before a roomful of mayor's aides and city attorneys. "Second Amendment rights? Boolsheet! I'm payin' when [gun victims] go to the hospital. . . . We comin' after 'em; we are a bad dream for the gun industry."

Back at Vizard's, I ask Gauthier how he's going to win what looks to be a weak case. He is, after all, alleging that the industry hasn't properly warned people about the dangers of its product. This has drawn abject ridicule from writers who cover the gun industry, like Massad Ayoob, who says, "Highway departments must be negligent for not putting up signs that say 'Do not drive off bridge.' Hell's Angels are negligent for not having a sign outside their favorite bar that says 'Do not stand in doorway and scream 'Kawasaki rules.' There are certain basic laws in life. It's kind of understood." Though calls right now are running four-to-one against the suit, Gauthier says he'll get what he needs in discovery. One might think he's bluffing, though in the courtroom, Gauthier is not known as a gambler. He tests every aspect of his cases, making such elaborate use of mock trials that he even had a courtroom built in his law offices, complete with hidden cameras and a jury box.

Mike St. Martin suddenly adds drama to the discussion by pushing back from the table and drawing a snubnose .38 from under his jacket. Since its only noticeable safety is that the hammer isn't cocked, I ask St. Martin how his wife feels about light gunplay during dinner. "Safe," he says. Having captured our undivided attention, the Alligator conducts a teach-in on the perils of showing one's hand, which may explain why Gauthier grins his coprophagous grin and fails to elaborate about his strategy in the gun suit.

St. Martin's lesson about not giving anything away comes courtesy of their hunting buddy Edwin Edwards, who used to earn three times his gubernatorial salary at the craps tables. Edwards and the Alligator once found themselves—shades of Tom Wolfe's *A Man in Full*—quail-shooting at a Georgia plantation with a group of New York stockbrokers. In their L.L. Bean jackets and double-billed caps, the New Yorkers "couldn't hit their ass with both hands," says St. Martin.

"So the guv'nah gets out there and shoots at one bird and misses altogether. He shoots the second bird and just nicks it. He comes walkin' back and I say, 'God*damn* Edwin, those were easy shots.' So I walk out there, they threw two birds, and I blew 'em to dust. I come back lookin' kind of smug, and Edwin pulls me over to the side and says, 'You stupid coon-ass!' I say, 'What's wrong?' He says, 'This afternoon, those Yankees were gonna think we couldn't shoot worth a damn. We were gonna be able to shoot against them for fifty to a hundred thousand dollars, and you just f— it all up. Now they know you can shoot, and they never gonna gamble with us.'

"That afternoon, Edwin gets in a gin rummy game with one of them," adds the Alligator, shaking his head while Gauthier beams admiringly. "He clipped that guy for a fortune." ♦

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"Hyde and Seek"

This battleship of a man, broad in the beam, bent over, down by the bow, you might say, ploughed straight ahead. This Capital ship's prow boasted a splendid figurehead crowned with a splash of steel-gray hair. The U.S.S. Henry Hyde sailed into the Oval Office.

"Welcome, Henry!" this President greeted him. "Come to sink me or to save me?"

"Well, now, Mr. President," Congressman Hyde replied, "that's for you to say and for me to find out."

"O.K."

"To begin, if I'm a battleship what do I have to worry about with a pathetic 'Flyntlock' aimed at my thick armor or Mr. Livingston's, Mr. Barr's or anyone's?"

"Got it, Henry. You're talking about your own personal, past indiscretion, as they call it."

"Precisely."

"So," this President continued.

"I turned, in my hour of need, to my fellow Republican from my own State of Illinois."

"Then?"

"I called on the great Civil War President in the Lincoln Memorial. It was late at night. I was alone. He knew about my earlier indiscretion. I asked him what to do," said Henry Hyde.

"What did he say?"

"Just tell the truth, the whole truth. Then, he told me about you, Bill Clinton."

"Hard to believe. What?"

"Just believe," said Mr. Hyde. "Mr. Lincoln told me to tell you none of us is perfect, me, you, even him."

"Go on."

"Mr. Lincoln said he met with George Washington about you."

"Yes! Yes!" this President exclaimed. "Tell me!"

"I'm to tell you that, before this trial of yours is over, if you have the courage to tell the whole truth, George Washington will see to it that a monument to honor you will be built in the shadow of the monument to him."

"I can't believe it," gasped this President.

"George Washington told Mr. Lincoln that that's exactly what you'd say, that you can't believe it. Mr. Lincoln told me to tell you that George Washington said he cannot tell a lie."

"Well, I'll be —!" this President cried out.

"Something else I have to say to you, Mr. President."

"What?"

"Mr. Lincoln said if you tell the whole truth, face the consequences, even resignation, that he, Mr. Lincoln will support President Washington. That a monument to you will be built in the shadow of the one to the first President."

"What's this monument to be?"

Henry Hyde measured his words and slowly said, "It's to be called The Fountain Of Truth."

"Good God in heaven, Henry. This is my deliverance!"

"Maybe. It's entirely up to you, Bill Clinton."

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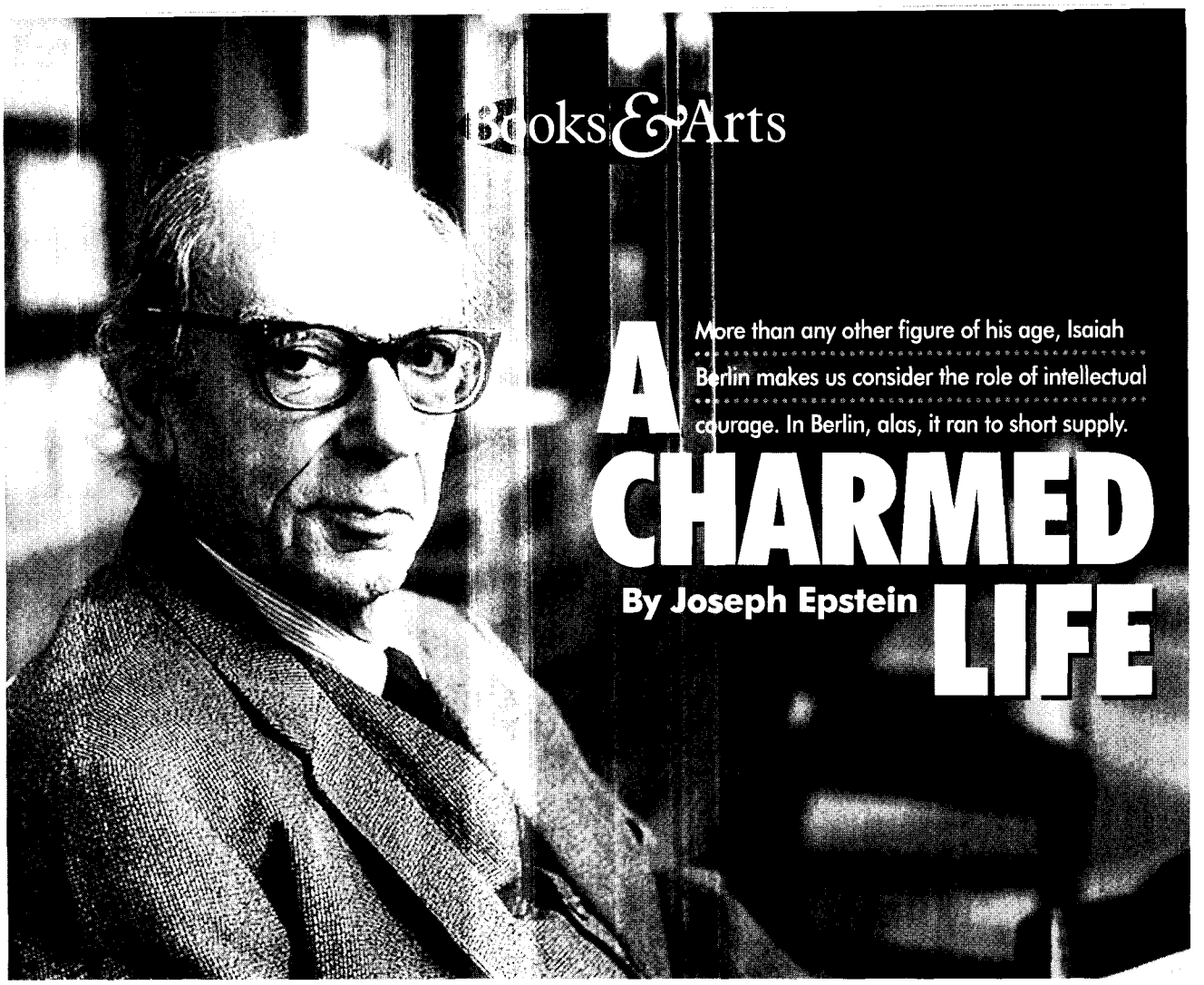

More than any other figure of his age, Isaiah Berlin makes us consider the role of intellectual courage. In Berlin, alas, it ran to short supply.

A CHARMED LIFE

By Joseph Epstein

Isaiah Berlin—with two long i's in the first name for the proper pronunciation, please—was a name that rang the gong in the best academic and intellectual circles for nearly half a century. "Isaiah"—I have heard that name roll off anglophiliac lips with no less pleasure than a wine connoisseur might say Château Le Pin. During the most radical days of the *New York Review of Books*, he helped sustain that journal's respectability. Conservatives were not displeased to quote him, either. In at least three countries—England, the United States, and Israel—the name Isaiah Berlin held its own special juju or magical ability to summon significant meaning.

A philosopher by training who later became an historian chiefly of political ideas, a figure and fixture at Oxford, where he spent the better (and best) part of his life, Isaiah Berlin was an international intellectual celebrity. He had a way of showing up in the best places—not least among them, in the indexes of books by or about Virginia Woolf, Igor Stravinsky, Evelyn Waugh, Joseph Alsop, and Katherine Graham. "I know the difference between Irving Berlin and Isaiah Berlin," the public relations man and consummate name-dropper Ben Sonnenberg Sr. said, "and I know them both."

MICHAEL IGNATIEFF
Isaiah Berlin
A Life
Metropolitan, 480 pp., $30

ISAIAH BERLIN
The Proper Study of Mankind
An Anthology of Essays
Farrar Straus & Giroux, 668 pp., $35

Berlin's chief form was the biographical essay in which he traced the course of ideas through the lives of such writers as Vico, Machiavelli, Tolstoy, Turgenev, and others. (His one continuous book, a slender volume on Karl Marx, is disappointing.) In other, more purely political essays, his tendency was to argue against single-idea or "Great System" thinkers, and he became *the* philosopher of political limitation: against historical inevitability, for the liberty of the individual against that of the state, of two minds about the quality of progress represented by the Enlightenment. Liberals, he felt, were insufficiently impressed by the tragic quality inherent in life. Among his most often used quotations was Kant's remark: "Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made."

The labels "philosopher" and "political thinker" never seemed quite the right fit for Berlin. His talent, his propensity, and his instincts always seemed at least partially artistic. His biographical essays are those of a man who seeks to understand life as an artist does—which is why many of the essays have a continuing life and can be read, with intellectual profit, more than once.

Joseph Epstein is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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Until the middle 1970s—when he acquired the services of a highly conscientious volunteer editor named Henry Hardy who offered to round up Berlin's various essays and lectures and see them published in book form—one had little notion of Berlin's writing constituting a genuine oeuvre, a body of work coherent within itself and carrying cumulative meaning.

I wrote that the essay was Berlin's chief form; more precisely, his true form was the extended, impressive, torrential schmooze. One of the most interesting revelations of Michael Ignatieff's biography is that Berlin did not write his essays—he dictated them to a secretary, polishing them later. People who spent time with Berlin have remarked on the striking similarity between his speech and his prose. Garrulity in speech, verbosity on the page, these, Berlin half-recognized, were his weakness.

Some among his critics felt this verbosity not an amusing but a serious flaw. A.J.P. Taylor told Edmund Wilson that when Berlin couldn't get into his subject, he "tried to carry things off 'with a burst of words.'" This quality in Berlin, subordinate clause lashed to subordinate clause, triplet after quadruplet of adjectives, gives many of his essays a shapeless quality, a feeling of overload, depriving them of the economy that is central to the essay.

All who knew, met, or merely heard Isaiah Berlin felt the need to describe him in verbal action, like so many pilgrims fresh from viewing one of the natural wonders of the world. "The first thing that everyone noticed about him," Berlin's friend Maurice Bowra wrote, "was the rapidity of his speech, which matched an equal rapidity in his thought. Some of us talked fast enough already, but Isaiah talked even faster, and at times I found it hard to keep up with him." Robert Wokler recently wrote that Berlin "was profligate with words; his knighthood, it was suggested, having been bestowed on him for services to conversation."

It was a show that no one, once having witnessed it, soon forgot. It swept people up; it conquered, it captivated. Edmund Wilson noted in his diary:

> Isaiah Berlin affected me like nobody else I had known; though he was not particularly handsome, I tended to react to him a little as if he were an attractive woman whom I wanted to amuse and please: and this attitude on my part, evoked a kind of coquetry on his.

If Berlin seems to have given so much pleasure to friends over a long life, his own pleasures were seen to from the beginning of his life. Michael Ignatieff cites four significant facts connected with his birth in 1909: It followed that of an earlier, stillborn sister; he was the boy his parents longed for; he sustained a permanent injury to his left arm when the delivering physician too vigorously used the forceps on him; and he was to remain an only child. He was born, a Jew in Riga, Latvia, to a lumber-merchant father who was sufficiently suc-

cessful for the family to be able to move to St. Petersburg. His mother had a livelier mind than his father, and her love for her son was unstinting. The young Isaiah seems to have grown up under the reign of that "family egotism" in which, as Tolstoy put it, "parents decide that the rest of the world can go to hell as long as all is well with our little Andrei."

Although they survived the Russian Revolution, Berlin's father in 1921 wisely transported the family to England, where he had business connections and had stored up some £10,000. The money eased the exile, though there must have been difficult moments as what Michael Ignatieff describes as this "plump, unprepossessing Jewish child in a Gentile school, a bookish boy with a foreign accent and limp left arm" sought to win people over. But Berlin was to prove the consummate assimilationist, able to slide himself easily into any social circle he desired.

His entree, all his days, was his intelligence and his charm. The former was first put to service in gaining entrance to the best English schools. At St. Paul's his reputation as a charming talker—as a non-stop, talk-for-its-own-lovely-sake talker—began. He won through talk what others might win through athletics. His oddity seems never to have been held against him. Nor, apparently, was his Jewishness. His mother kept a kosher home, and Berlin throughout his life observed Passover and Yom Kippur as a matter of allegiance, though he seems to have been a skeptic, and religion scarcely figures in his writing.

Berlin was very smart very young—smart and savvy and subtle. In an essay on freedom written at St. Paul's at eighteen, he declared, "it hurts no man to conform if he knows that conformity is only a kind of manners, a sort of universal etiquette." There was never any question of going into his father's profitable business; one of the things such a business makes possible, after all, is the maintenance of brilliant sons such as Isaiah. After failing to win a place at Balliol College, Oxford, he won a scholarship at Corpus Christi. He developed a love for the long, looping Victorian sentence—an early addiction was to the prose of Macaulay, another lord of loquacity—and tutors criticized his essays for rattling on at too great length.

Berlin's was the generation that entered Oxford just as Evelyn Waugh, Cyril Connolly, Harold Acton, and the other "Children of the Sun" (as Martin Green called them) were leaving. The great names of his own generation included Maurice Bowra, Stephen Spender, A.J. Ayer, R.H.S. Crossman, and Stuart Hampshire. Bowra, a rebel in those days, was known as leader of "the immoral front." Berlin, though part of Bowra's circle, was able to make himself welcome wherever he wished, without

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The twenty-year-old Isaiah Berlin at college, 1929. Opposite page, age one in Latvia, 1910.

deeply committing himself to one faction or another. He had the reputation, rare among talkers, of actually listening, of expending genuine sympathy on the problems of others, of being able to put himself into the minds of others, which would later become one of his important traits as an analyst of the writings of men with whose ideas he disagreed.

Berlin considered careers in journalism and in law. But he was also a most gifted student—gifted enough to win election to a coveted fellowship at All Souls College. Nothing could have suited him better, for he disliked the grind of teaching, and All Souls, a precursor of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, had no students. It also carried enormous prestige. He was the first Jew ever to win a fellowship to All Souls. His election made him something of a celebrity within wealthier Jewish circles in England, and he found easy access to such homes as those of the Baron de Rothschild.

Berlin had an instinct for meeting important people. In 1938, he met Freud and, soon after, Chaim Weizmann. He became friendly with Elizabeth Bowen. He impressed Virginia Woolf, but not enough for her entirely to shed her anti-Semitism: "a Portuguese Jew, by the look of him, Oxford's leading light." Berlin himself was a man without the least xenophobia. In Oxford, he was thought an insider, maybe an insider's insider.

Berlin gradually drifted away from philosophy to do the history of ideas, for which he thought himself better equipped, if only because it was less open-ended. His line had been analytical philosophy, and he played the game well enough to give a lecture at Cambridge that apparently did not entirely bore Wittgenstein. Of his standing as a philosopher, Berlin said, "I knew I wasn't first-rate, but I was good enough. I was quite respected. I wasn't despised. I was one of the brethren." He also thought the logical positivism he had been practicing an intellectual dead end. "I gradually came to the conclusion," he would later say, "that I should prefer a field in which one could hope to know more at the end of one's life than when one had begun."

Berlin's own mind tended toward the historical, the exceptional case, the idea or cluster of ideas operating within a given time. He was not a pure thinker, but a reactive one who did better rubbing up against the ideas of others. Historical context became another crucial element in his thought. Stuart Hampshire thought all this so much twaddle, "period talking" he called it, vague and neither quite logical nor very positivistic.

Soon after England's entry into World War II, Berlin found himself in New York, where he had traveled with the Communist spy Guy Burgess (who planned to go on to Moscow, with Berlin serving as his unwitting cover). In the event, Burgess was called back to England, and Berlin stayed on in the United States. The British Embassy availed itself of his services in helping to get America into the war by influencing trade unions, black organizations, and Jewish groups to take up pro-British, anti-German positions. "America was," as Michael Ignatieff writes, "the making of him." With his talent for insinuating himself with important figures, Berlin soon became friendly with Supreme

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Court Justices Louis Brandeis and Felix Frankfurter, Charles Bohlen, Joseph Alsop, and the ineluctable Alice Roosevelt Longworth. He seemed naturally to gravitate toward power, toward establishments.

Liking Americans though he did, he found their talk dull. They found his own talk scintillating. The Americans he encountered took great pleasure in his ironic descriptions of their country, delivered, as Ignatieff puts it, "in his rapid-fire semi-Martian vernacular."

Part of Berlin's job was to send back to England summaries about America's readiness to enter the war. These were read by a very select audience, including the King, Winston Churchill, and Anthony Eden. He might have been described as an English purveyor of American gossip on the state of the world—for which years of Oxford gossip seem to have served him well. His audience sometimes found his dispatches too colored—a bit "too perfervid," said Churchill; perhaps, added Eden, with "too generous [an] Oriental flavor"—but they lent him cachet as a bright man with a penchant for making the best connections in the highest of places.

These dispatches were also responsible for a famous comic anecdote about the confusion between Isaiah and Irving Berlin. In the anecdote, Winston Churchill, at a dinner party, mistakes Irving for Isaiah. He asks the songwriter his advice on a number of political questions—when does he think the war will end, will Roosevelt run again—to which confusing answers are forthcoming. He then inquires what Mr. Berlin thinks is the most important thing he has written, to which the unhesitant reply is: "White Christmas." The story was too delicious not to get around—Churchill, when he discovered his faux pas, himself told it to his cabinet. As Ignatieff notes, Isaiah Berlin gained a celebrity through the story without having to do anything to earn it. But then things had a way of dropping into his lap.

Berlin also had a knack for historical timing. He meets David Ben-Gurion as the state of Israel is forming. After the war, he travels to the Soviet Union and is put in touch with Boris Pasternak, who later asks his help in smuggling out *Dr. Zhivago*. Twice on trips to the Soviet Union, Berlin visited Anna Akhmatova, then in internal exile under Stalin. A great poet, she had a correspondingly great talent for self-dramatization, and lent to her two meetings with Isaiah Berlin great historical import. He felt himself utterly mesmerized by her, thought himself in love with her. She wrote a poem, "Poem Without a Hero," in which he figures as "the guest from beyond the looking glass."

All photos: Metropolitan Books / Henry Holt

The forty-six-year-old Isaiah Berlin, 1955. Opposite page, the schoolboy, c. 1920.

This connection, too, added to Berlin's prestige in the social as well as intellectual realm. By his late thirties, Lady Sibyl Colefax, Lady Emerald Cunard, and the American Marietta Tree sought him out for their parties; he became a social collectible. Churchill asked for—and apparently accepted—his literary advice on *The Gathering Storm*, his memoir of the 1930s. Einstein was pleased to meet with him. Chaim Weizmann wanted him to write his biography; Ben-Gurion offered him the directorship of the Israeli Foreign Office. His annual pilgrimages to the United States became events among the more socially advanced American intellectuals. His became a good name to drop.

Berlin entered the sexual fray rather late in life. He was never greatly enamored of his looks or physical gifts; he had, from quite early in life, what seemed to be the gift of perpetual middle age. He thought he might live out his

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days celibate. In an otherwise handsomely proportioned biography, Michael Ignatieff reports in perhaps more detail than required his subject's rather inept sexual coming out at the age of forty-one. Berlin showed a small talent for picking the wrong women. But here, too, his good luck held, and in 1956, at the age of forty-seven, he pursued a married woman, the (eventually divorced) wife of a colleague. She was a woman with wide tolerance for his settled ways and sufficient wealth for him never to have to work again. Once more he had landed nicely on his feet.

The last twenty years of Berlin's life, his biographer reports, were the happiest. Talks delivered over the BBC made his reputation as a dazzling lecturer grow even greater. He was appointed head of Wolfson, a new Oxford college for the study of social science, a position he much enjoyed. He was elected president of the British Academy. Honorary degrees, festschrifts, literary prizes rolled in. He was awarded the Order of Merit, which somehow set the seal on his self-doubt. He lived out his days in good health, surrounded by music (his great passion), conscientious servants, an admiring family. After his death at the age of eighty-eight, Isaac Stern and Alfred Brendel—friends, of course—played at his memorial service. In Michael Ignatieff, he has found a sympathetic and properly suave biographer. A charmed life.

Yet even into the most charmed of lives, a measure of doubt must fall, and in Isaiah Berlin it was a fairly large measure. As an intellectual, Ignatieff reports, Berlin wished to occupy a firm middle ground. "He was looking for a path between heavy-going engagement and mandarin detachment. He wanted to be serious without being solemn, to defend beliefs without being dogmatic and to be entertaining without being facile." This is nicely formulated, and Berlin seems to have achieved it. Still, it wasn't, one suspects, quite enough.

Berlin had won the regard of the world of the *New York Review of Books*, but, at the next rung up the intellectual ladder, among the serious players, his accomplishments were viewed more skeptically. Leo Strauss, Michael Oakeshott, Raymond Aron, the men whom he must have looked upon as his true peers, were not quite persuaded by Isaiah Berlin, not quite ready to grant him the serious intellectual status he craved, even though he shared many of their core beliefs.

Though a political philosopher, Berlin preferred not to speak on particular political questions. Instead he wrote on the need to tolerate a pluralism of human views and values—a pluralism, he rightly insisted, that did not need to dwindle into an empty relativism. He tried to keep his idealism in equipoise with strong skepticism, something he much admired in Alexander Herzen, the

nineteenth-century Russian intellectual exiled to London, who was one of his great heroes. But in Berlin it didn't quite come off, perhaps because he was too chary of taking positions that might make him enemies.

In attempting to formulate Berlin's politics, Ignatieff at one point calls him "neither a conservative nor a laissez-faire individualist, but a New Deal liberal." At another point he writes that Berlin "was a liberal social democrat, but he was more comfortable socially among conservatives. He tried to have it both ways."

Ignatieff tells of Berlin's admiration for "Toscanini, Churchill, Weizmann—men whose vices he excused because they did not include a fatal eagerness to please." Ignatieff puts the best possible face on this apparent eagerness to please, writing that "all his life he was to be reproached for the freedom of his friendships, for his capacity to be relatively indifferent to someone's views, providing they had other redeeming virtues." One has to applaud this, if true, for no one should be reduced to and judged upon his opinions merely. Yet issues arise in which one is bound—almost as part of being engaged with one's time, almost as part of being human—to take stands and positions, to risk enmity.

Ignatieff reports that Berlin despised Herbert Marcuse and Hannah Arendt for their loftily theoretical and ultimately cold-hearted views about the nature of the German death camps. (Nor did he like professional Holocausters.) But he kept his contempt to his correspondence, never speaking out publicly. He had no difficulty in announcing himself anti-Communist, was even skeptical about the "thaw" that was said to set in with Nikita Khrushchev after the death of Stalin. But my guess is that even here he might have found overly strong anti-communism a bit excessive—that is to say, vulgar. He cannot have approved the student depredations upon the universities, both in England and America, but here, too, he was silent. "One of the last things that Berlin said to me, not long before his death," Ian Buruma recently wrote in the *New Republic*, "was that he wanted to fly to Israel just to shake the hands of his liberal friends who continued to believe that Palestinians no less than Jews had a right to feel at home and be free." I do not doubt he said this to Buruma. That he himself would have said it publicly is all but inconceivable.

The most revealing Berlin essay is the one adopted from his Romanes Lecture on Turgenev. It is about the great Russian novelist's inability, reflected in the murkiness of *Fathers and Sons*, to declare which side he was on in the struggle for Russian destiny. The left thought Turgenev created his young nihilist, Bazarov, to be mocked, while those on the right thought he was mocking the Russia of tradition and aspirations toward European culture. "But it was the attack from the left," Berlin writes, "that hurt Turgenev most," and

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later in the essay, he adds: "He found the scorn of the young unjust beyond endurance." Finally, Berlin justifies Turgenev, implicitly rating him above Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky by crediting him with greater subtlety and appreciation for complexity:

> His very gifts, his power of minute and careful observation, his fascination with the varieties of character and situation as such, his detachment, his inveterate habit of doing justice to the full complexity and diversity of goals, attitudes, beliefs—these seemed to [his enemies] morally self-indulgent and politically irresponsible.

Anyone who has followed Berlin's career will find no difficulty in replacing Turgenev's name in this passage with that of Isaiah Berlin.

But was Berlin's thinking too complex for taking any determined position on the issues of his day at all? Or might it instead have been the all-too-cautious instincts of the outsider who has succeeded beyond all dreams in beautifully assimilating himself in the socially closed world of smart society, the reward for which was a lifelong fear of making waves?

Michael Ignatieff asked the eighty-five-year-old Berlin what had most surprised him about his life. "The mere fact," he answered, "that I should have lived so peacefully and so happily through so many horrors." He neglected to mention that there is an art to achieving this—the art of careful detachment.

Yet detachment, too, has its limits. Without intellectual courage, even the most charmed of lives lose their allure; unwilling to declare their beliefs, even the most brilliant of men are in the end divested of their gravity. In a 1967 letter to his friend Jean Floud, Berlin wrote: "I always want everybody to be satisfied: the wolf, as the Russian proverb says, to be satisfied and yet the sheep to remain uneaten: which, I dare say, cannot be done in this world."

But his problem with speaking his mind may have run deeper. Perhaps more than any other figure of his age, Berlin forces one to consider the significance of intellectual courage in the life of the mind. In Isaiah Berlin, alas, it ran to short supply. ♦

WIRING AMERICA

Kevin Kelly's Vision of Techno-Utopia

By Mark Gerson

Kevin Kelly is executive editor of *Wired* magazine, the monthly bible of the techno-utopians, and his book *New Rules for the New Economy* is techno-utopianism in all its fullness: adolescent rantings against authority; promiscuous generalizations that would be maddening if they weren't so silly; blissful ignorance of nuance and complication; irreverent dismissiveness of religion, culture, tradition, and practically everything that shapes the moral life; meaningless aphorisms ("No harmony. All flux."); and a breathless reductionism that is encapsulated in sentences like, "We are simply unable to deal with questions that cannot be answered by means of technology."

KEVIN KELLY
New Rules for the New Economy
Ten Radical Strategies for a Connected World
Viking, 144 pp., $19.95

The fact remains that Kevin Kelly is a smart man, and his book and magazine are full of telling facts and interesting observations. And Kelly's book is less than 150 pages, which means that tolerant readers have to do a minimal amount of slogging through the mush to arrive at some genuine insights.

Kelly's most valuable insight is in his discussion of network goods. A network good is one that dramatically increases in value (with a corresponding reduction in cost) when it is widely used. As Kelly points out, a fax machine cost $1,000 in 1965 and connected its user to a network worth $1 million. Now, a fax machine costs $200 and connects its user to a network worth $3 billion. Kelly is not exactly breaking new ground here, but he does an excellent job of seeing the observation through to its consequences.

The Internet, as Kelly and others have pointed out, is the ultimate network good. Just three years ago, the Internet and its popular applications such as e-mail were largely limited to universities. Now, e-mail addresses are nearly universal and almost every organization has its own Web site. A commercial Internet barely existed in 1995; now it is rapidly becoming as important as the telephone. The stock market has responded in kind, boosting Internet stocks to seemingly inexplicable heights. In stock value, the Web site Yahoo! is now worth twice as much as Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, which owns hundreds of media properties all over the world. The stock value of America Online dwarfs that of all the television networks combined, and the online retailer Amazon.com is worth more than Barnes & Noble and Borders combined. Except for the investments made in health care, practically all venture capital dollars are now flowing to entrepreneurs trying to harness the new medium in creative and untested ways.

All this makes the question almost irresistible: Why are Americans, especially Americans in business, so fixated on the Internet? There is, after all, nothing in the food or water of America that explains why the telephone, the television, and dozens of lesser technologies were born here. But there is something in the *culture* of America that does.

Rather than search for what generates our culture's enthusiasm for technology, Kelly simply conflates the two: "Technology has become our culture, and our culture technology." But the reductionism of techno-utopians shouldn't obscure the real and deeply American reasons for the popularity of the Internet.

Like so much about this country, the American passion for the Internet is best described in Alexis de Tocqueville's 1835 masterpiece *Democracy in America*. "In democracies nothing has brighter luster

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than commerce; it attracts the attention of the public and fills the imagination of the crowd; all passionate energies are directed that way." The attraction of this medium is seen in more than the rapid adoption of the Internet. Not only do ordinary Americans use it, but they buy and sell it. Ordinary Americans are the ones fueling the excitement surrounding stocks like Amazon.com and Yahoo!

One day late last year, the average trade in Netscape was 615 shares; the average trade in Yahoo! was 458 shares. These aren't the size of mutual and hedge funds transactions. They're trades that ordinary individuals, often buying from their online trading accounts, are capable of. What Tocqueville said of America on the eve of the Industrial Revolution applies eerily well to America in the Information Revolution: "In the United States the great industrial undertakings are executed without trouble because the whole population is engaged in industry and because the poorest man as well as the most opulent gladly joins forces therein."

The ability of Tocqueville to teach us about Internet mania is definitive proof of the primacy of culture over technology. Between Tocqueville and Kelly, we have seen the development of nearly every modern technology: from the electric light to the railroad to the automobile to the telephone to the Internet. If these technologies were determinants of culture, Tocqueville's descriptions of America in 1835 would have no resonance with us today. Instead, he explains aspects of our society with a clarity unequaled by Kelly or anyone else.

Tocqueville would certainly disagree with the techno-utopians. But he would understand why this era of great technological innovation often drives intelligent people to such absurd, sweeping conclusions. As Tocqueville put it:

> When the dominion of precedent is left behind, . . . one has a natural inclination to deduce the motives for one's views from the very nature of man, and that leads of necessity and almost in spite of oneself to a great number of very broad generalizations. So democratic man likes generalizations because they save him the trouble of studying particular cases.

Kevin Kelly—and his techno-utopian friends at *Wired* magazine—would offer more than an occasional insight if they tempered their enthusiasm for the Internet with a recognition of what Tocqueville called, "the strange stability of certain principles" in America.

Techno-utopians are right to look at the new medium with awe, for its astonishing potential to facilitate the exchange of information, to revolutionize communication, to transform commerce, and to create enormous wealth. But its potential is not unlimited. Human nature did not change on or about August 9, 1995, when Netscape began selling its stock, just as it did not change with the advent of radio, television, telephone, radar, or any other technological advance of this American century. ♦

Ex-Friendly Fire

Norman Podhoretz on the New York Intellectuals

By Daniel Patrick Moynihan

With the publication of *Ex-Friends*, Norman Podhoretz has performed a near to thrilling intellectual feat. Each of the figures he takes up in memory and judgment—Allen Ginsberg, Lionel and Diana Trilling, Lillian Hellman, Hannah Arendt, and Norman Mailer—is a prototype of sorts. Together they mark the range of intellectual life in New York City in the 1960s and, of course, far beyond. As a coda to *Breaking Ranks*, Podhoretz's wonderful 1979 volume of memoirs, *Ex-Friends* will be with us a long while.

NORMAN PODHORETZ
Ex-Friends
The Civil War of the New York Intellectuals
Free Press, 256 pp., $25

In January 1960, at the age of thirty, Norman Podhoretz was appointed editor of the influential monthly journal *Commentary*, a post at which he served, for thirty-five years, until his retirement in 1995. The image of standing post—like a sentry—is surely appropriate, for in the history of American letters hardly anyone has stood a watch as prolonged, as perilous, and, in the end, as unflinchingly as he. (Some future biographer will surely want to know that Podhoretz was once "Soldier of the Month" in his battalion in occupied Germany: Discipline and training matters, and not just that to be had at Columbia University and Clare College, Cambridge.) As a condition of accepting the offer from the American Jewish Committee, the publisher of *Commentary*, he had stipulated that the journal would move beyond its previous primary interest in Jewish affairs to a more general engagement with the American culture. And this has made all the difference.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan is the senior United States senator from New York.

Podhoretz saw himself as first of all a literary critic—Trilling had been and remained his mentor and patron—but with a difference about which he was explicit in *Doings and Undoings*, his collection of essays from 1953 to 1964. (The essays, he allowed in the introduction, did not seem the work of a single person: In the course of his development, "Two, I think, or possibly three" different Norman Podhoretzes had produced them.)

> A literary critic ought—or so they tell me—to regard literature as an end in itself; otherwise he has no business being a literary critic. For better or worse, however, I do not regard literature as an end in itself. (And neither do those young men who are responsible for some of the dated pieces in this collection—which is one of the things, at least, I still have in common with them.) . . . What I mean, then, in

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> saying that for me literature is not an end in itself is that I look upon it as a mode of public discourse that either illuminates or fails to illuminate the common ground on which we live.

This, he continued, is what Blake meant when he commented that Milton in *Paradise Lost* was really of the Devil's party; so also F.R. Leavis at Cambridge, who evidently had "not found a single novel or poem written in the last twenty years or so that could satisfy his critical standards—not a single one."

Podhoretz had been a student of Leavis's at Cambridge in the early 1950s, where he had commenced a doctoral dissertation on the political novels of Benjamin Disraeli, thinking it might "land me a job in the Columbia English Department." There was also the possibility of teaching in England. He chose instead to go home and be drafted—only to be sent back to Europe rather than Korea.

Random things, and yet not: Fascinated by Disraeli, that nineteenth-century Jewish prime minister and novelist, who led his party of High Church Tories to some grasp of the national divisions—the "two nations"—in which Britons then lived; tossing it over to go off to war; returning to make his way as a young writer amidst the political battles and the then-intensifying *Kulturkampf* that ever waxes and wanes in New York.

In the beginning, the young critic was not as critical as he would later wish he had been. To read *Doings and Undoings* today is to recognize that, indeed, "two or possibly three" young men had written the essays. "The sighing and the suing," as Gilbert and Sullivan would say, went on. But that was to be the invariable path of Norman Podhoretz's life. And there would be more young men, more Norman Podhoretzes, to come. Well, at least two more.

First was the young radical, carrying on the high tradition that had developed among the largely Jewish intellectual community of New York. It was a complex fate, in that nothing was ever quite what it seemed or quite what it had been.

The *Partisan Review* was the archetypal journal of those New York intellectuals Podhoretz calls "The Family," though the journal itself was in something of a passive phase when he began his meteoric rise. The *Partisan Review* proved to have not much of a future, but oh what a past: begun in 1934 as an organ of the John Reed Clubs; stern Stalinists all, writing about literature in a milieu with more than its share of spies. (Reed, we now know, took a million or so dollars in Kremlin gold back home to get the party going.) As the 1930s wore on, the Stalinist faith faltered. But the politics remained within the diaspora.

Free Press

Norman Podhoretz in 1998.

If you broke with Stalin, it was to ally with Trotsky.

There followed a calm of sorts. Then the 1960s dawned, and the radical critique of American society revived. It was more cultural than political at first: Norman Podhoretz began his long tenure at *Commentary* by publishing the sociologist Paul Goodman on the problem of children in America "growing up absurd." (To declare my interest, in 1961 he would also publish a long essay of mine on the class and ethnic basis of the battle then raging between the "bosses" and the "reformers" in the New York Democratic party. Podhoretz took some delight in the observation that the extent of Tammany boss Carmine DeSapio's ideology could be had from an address to a Holy Name Society breakfast in which he laid it down that "There is no Mother's Day behind the Iron Curtain.")

As Podhoretz relates in his—did I mention absorbing?—*Ex-Friends*, this is the sequence by which the young editor grew ever closer to the ever more strident causes of the Left, Old and New. (Hilton Kramer has recently recalled a phrase of Frederick Crews describing one of the former editors of *Partisan Review* as having become a "born-again Leninist.")

In one sense, there is nothing much more to this than that as a new editor he needed new voices. Even in a recycled mode. But there was more. The protracted ideological mobilization of World War II and then the Cold War was being questioned, if only because it was, well, there. Podhoretz talks of those days in *Breaking Ranks*—his previous memoir, in which he records his transition from Left to Right. The volume begins with a letter to his son:

> The other day, reminded by some passing remark that I used to be a radical—indeed that I visibly and enthusiastically participated in the swing to radicalism in the early 1960s—you asked me with astonishment in your voice whether I had ever really believed "all that stuff." The thought of your father in connection with "all that stuff" evidently strikes you as a contradiction in terms. No wonder. All your conscious life you've known me as an opponent of the New Left and the counterculture and their various descendants in the liberal culture. For all your precocity you could never fully understand why I always seemed to be against everything everyone else in the world—your teachers, your classmates, your friends—seemed to be for. I would try to explain whenever you asked me, but it was all so complicated and you were just too young to take it in. You're a little less young now, however, and maybe the time has come for a fully detailed account.

For there *had* been a time when Podhoretz really did believe "all that stuff." The journey into and out of that world

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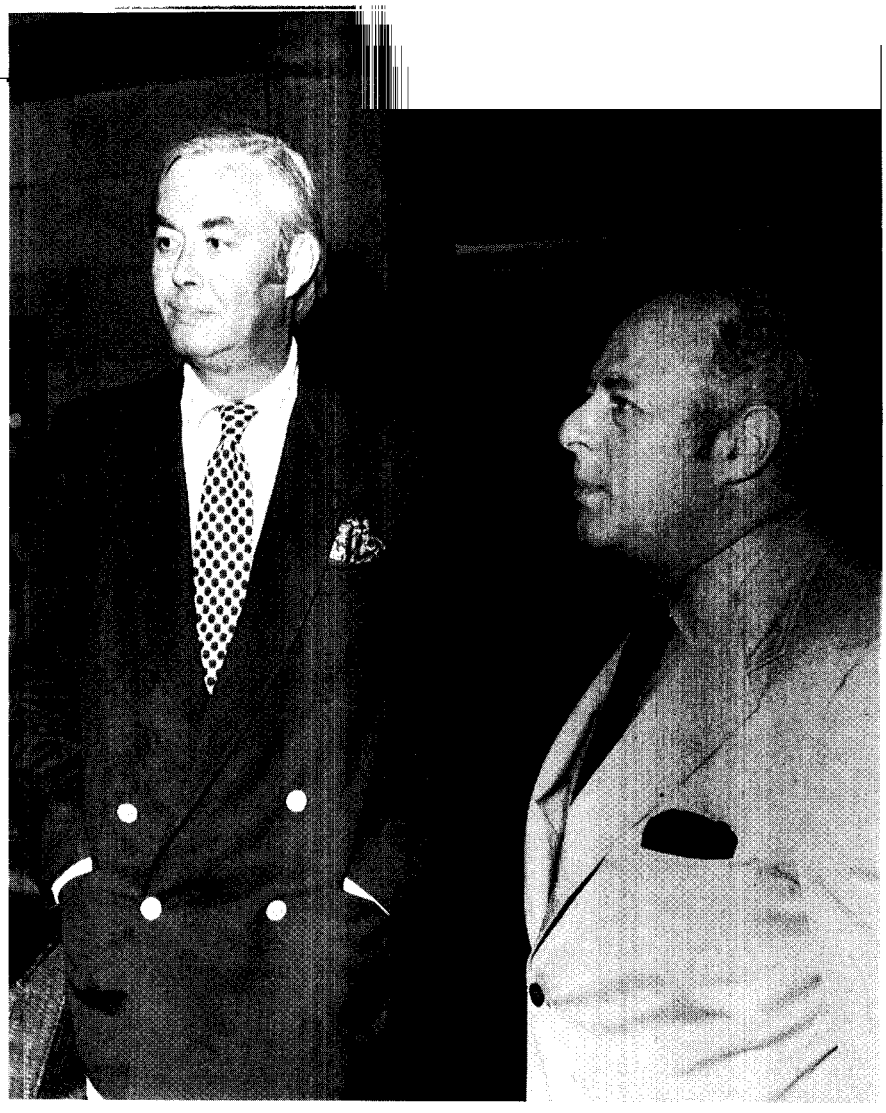
took a decade. In its course he made deep commitments and attachments to any number of grand intellectuals, writers, and activists of every kind on the Left. Then his views began to change, *Commentary* began to change—and so did his commitments and attachments. *Ex-Friends* relates five such.

What happened? First, of course, there was the intense anti-Americanism that developed on the Left. Nothing entirely new, but never before seen with such ferocity. The Communists and fellow travelers of the preceding decades were more pro-Soviet than anti-American. But in the 1960s it was different. Young people learned to detest "Amerika"—which was something a man who had left Cambridge University, a world of refinement and privilege, to join a wartime United States Army could not long abide. And he didn't long abide it.

There is one thing more, however, and Podhoretz is not the least averse to bringing it forward: Israel. It was at the time of the Six-Day War in 1967—the bombings, the boycotts—that for the first time American Jews were able to grasp the peril of Israel, a new nation hanging on from crisis to crisis. American support was indispensable—and yet on the American Left, a nascent anti-Semitism had begun to appear.

In *Ex-Friends*, Podhoretz relates all this in the painful chapter "Hannah Arendt's Jewish Problem—and Mine." *Commentary* once published an article by the theologian Emil Fackenheim, "who argued that a new commandment, the 614th, had been added by the experience of Auschwitz to the traditional 613. Positively the 614th commandment proclaimed that 'there shall be Jews'"—neither better nor worse than others, but a people in their own right whose existence was never to be put in question. However much Podhoretz admired Arendt's brilliance, he could never accept what he perceived to be her lack of support for Israel, and they quarreled and separated. There came in the years before her death in 1975, a reconciliation of sorts, but, Podhoretz relates, "we had grown too far apart on too many other important matters for us ever to become friends again. And so we never did."



Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Norman Podhoretz, 1973.

Lighter moments, too, made up the friendships, and Podhoretz fills the pages of *Ex-Friends* with marvelous vignettes. There's the tale of the night he met with the Beat poet Allen Ginsberg—who began by trying to persuade Podhoretz to support him in his effort to undo American mores and ended by screaming at Podhoretz, "We will get you through your children!" There's playwright Lillian Hellman gathering up the movie director William Wyler and dropping by Podhoretz's apartment unannounced—to wow an obscure young political science professor from Syracuse who was visiting that evening. And then there's the invitation to join an orgy offered to Podhoretz by Norman Mailer—who once accused Podhoretz of being a "fool-weather friend," only bothering to stand beside a friend when that friend was in trouble.

A reader—and still very much a friend—might offer but one quiet reservation: Surely Lionel Trilling and his wife Diana were never truly *ex*-friends. Indeed in the closing paragraph of the chapter on Trilling, he records, "I think about him a lot, always with admiration, gratitude, and indeed love." That is as it should be.

May we hope for yet another volume of memoirs from Norman Podhoretz? As William Faulkner said, "The past is never dead. It is not even past." May we hope for a return to those political novels of Disraeli? One thinks of the character in Disraeli's *Sybil*, "distinguished for ignorance, as he had but one idea and that was wrong." There are more such now than in Disraeli's time. It would be a joy to read Podhoretz's picks for today. ♦

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Parody

BUMPERS OUTDOES HENRY CLAY, *from A1*

Bumpers's stirring oratory, has brought such previously wavering senators as Barbara Boxer (D-Cal.) and Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) firmly into the Clinton camp. Schumer (D-N.Y.) says it was the fine distinctions in the early stages of the speech that convinced him there was more than one way of looking at the argument, particularly Bumpers's allusive opening: "Ah been widdat guy atta hunnert American Legion hoedowns," Bumpers began. "Ain't never once seen him put his hand on his zipper. Lotta people killed at Guadalcanal. Revenooer in Les Misérables by Victor Hugo shore was a sumbitch. Left arms and legs there. De minimus no curat lex. Blayrsted all overa place an' Bob Dole still walks with a gimp."

Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), too, claims he was stirred by Bumpers's exposition of the moral subtleties of the case. In an oratorical flurry hailed by jurist Jeb Frozen as the most Ciceronian Senate moment since Patty Murray's amendments to the Family and Medical Leave Act, Bumpers continued, "Lemme, em . . . wherinna hail's ma macrophone at? Ever hear the one about the leper anna prossitute? At's what Hamilton—vurry handsome man, broad-shouldered, and probbly no stranger to feminine dee-lats hisself. The Senate gives me goosebumps. Ass what Hamilton was talkin' 'bout in Federalist 412. And King Hussein loves the guy. Leper, as he's leavin' a room, he says, 'You can keep the tip.' Post hoc ergo propter hoc. It's that simple. Don' tell mah warf! Inna Oh-zorks, perjury ain't nothin' but a li'l itty-bitty, teensy-

(see BLOWHARD, P. A4)

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ONCE IN A BLUE MOON PEOPLE DO THE IMPOSSIBLE

BEHOLD THE F TECHNOLOGY. SPECTACULAR BREAKTHROUGHS THAT LEAD TO H MILESTONES. AND STEADY ADVANCEMENTS THAT QUIETLY TRANSFORM HUMAN LIVES. SPACE TECHNOLOGY DOES BOTH: LAUNCHING EPIC EVENTS SUCH AS THE FIRST LUNAR LANDING AND GENERATING THOUSANDS OF INNOVATIONS THAT EMPOWER THE PEOPLE OF EARTH. GPS UNITS TO DIRECT EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAMS. CONTROLS TO GUIDE MOTORIZED WHEELCHAIRS. MRI, PET AND CAT SCANS TO DETECT ELUSIVE DISEASES. SATELLITE IMAGERY TO MONITOR DANGEROUS STORMS AND KEEP THE PEACE. CELL PHONES AND COMMUNICATION SATELLITES TO EXTEND OUR REACH WORLDWIDE—AND A HOST OF OTHER TOOLS AND PROCESSES THAT PRESERVE AND ENRICH OUR LIVES. SPACE TECHNOLOGY—IT GAVE US THE MOON AND CONTINUES TO GIVE MORE THAN WE EVER IMAGINED. EVERY DAY.

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